

## ***Records Management and Archival Administration in Public Institutions in Cross River State***

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### **Abstract**

*Guided by two research questions and two null hypotheses, the study evaluated the records management practices and archival administration in public institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria. The public institutions used included the Cross River State Ministries of Education, Health, and Finance. Others are Civil Service Commission, Local Government Service Commission, and the State Secretariat Registry in Calabar. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, while a census sampling technique was employed involving the entire population of 62 records officers, administrative staff, and archival personnel across the sampled institutions. Data were collected using a researchers-developed instrument titled Records Management and Archival Administration Questionnaire (RMAAQ), which was validated by experts in Library and Information Science and tested for reliability, yielding Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.79 to 0.88. Mean, standard deviation and population t-test statistics were used in data analysis. The results revealed that records management practices in the public institutions are significantly high; and that the competency level of staff involved in archival administration is significantly high. Based on these findings, the study recommended, among others, that public institutions should invest in the development and implementation of standardized records management policies, automated filing systems, and digital archiving technologies.*

**Keywords:** records management, archival administration, public institutions, accountability, Cross River State.

### **Introduction**

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 parastatals 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, research archives, and administrative correspondence form the operational backbone of public institutions in Cross River State. However, the persistent challenges of misfiling, data loss, restricted access, and delayed retrieval of critical records remain widespread.

The availability and functionality of record-keeping infrastructure remain a major concern in many public institutions. Bassey and Udoh (2023) observed that storage facilities in many universities are often physically inadequate and technologically outdated, thereby limiting the effective preservation and management of institutional records. Similar challenges were investigated in this study, including insufficient information and communication technology (ICT) facilities, congested filing cabinets, and weak security mechanisms for protecting sensitive records. In addition, Etim and Ajibade (2022) reported that many institutions lack climate-controlled storage facilities and reliable backup systems necessary for the preservation of both physical and digital records. These deficiencies are also evident in several institutions in Cross River State, where inadequate infrastructure continues to hinder efficient records management and archival administration.

Effective records management and archival administration form the backbone of institutional accountability, transparency, and service delivery in public organisations worldwide (Duranti & Rogers, 2012; Iqbal & Khan, 2020). Public institutions are major producers and custodians of information that guide policy, governance, and socio-economic development, requiring robust systems for creation, organisation, storage, retrieval and preservation of records (Thompson, 2019; Msiska & Ngulube, 2018). In Nigeria, public sector records often suffer neglect due to weak coordination, outdated practices, and limited technological integration, resulting in misplaced, deteriorated or inaccessible records (Ezeani, 2019; Ogbomo & Edogbanya, 2021). These challenges have contributed to administrative inefficiency, poor decision-making, and weak accountability mechanisms in public institutions (Ojo, 2020; Okafor & Ano, 2021). Cross River State, like many sub-national jurisdictions in Nigeria, manages a large volume of records across ministries, commissions, and registries that require systematic oversight and archival care (Idoko & Onah, 2022; Ukachi & Ezeani, 2021). Uzochukwu and Nnadi (2023), reported that inadequate archival training among public sector staff compromises the sustainability and accessibility of records. In a similar circumstance, Nwosu (2022) highlights that institutional support including training opportunities, policy frameworks, and budget allocation is critical for effective archival administration in Nigerian government institutions

Records management refers to strategic processes designed to control the lifecycle of organisational records from creation through disposition, to ensure authenticity, integrity, accessibility and accountability (International Council on Archives [ICA], 2020; Yakubu, 2022). Archival administration complements records management by ensuring long-term preservation, access and ethical stewardship of records of enduring value (Babalola, 2020). Modern records and archival systems increasingly integrate digital tools, including electronic document management systems (EDMS), digitised repositories and automated retrieval software, to improve efficiency and access (Ngulube & Tafor, 2021; Bello & Adeniran, 2022). However, successful adoption of digital approaches often hinges on infrastructural support, policy frameworks, and the technical competence of records personnel (Mensah & Ofosu-Addo, 2020; Karanja & Ocholla, 2021). Where these factors are weak, institutions remain trapped in manual or semi-automated modes that undermine performance and sustainability (Kabunda, 2019; Oladokun & Olaniyi, 2022).

Empirical studies have shown that inadequate staff training and limited competency in records and archival practices directly affect the quality and reliability of institutional records (Chowdhury, 2021; Shongwe & Ngulube, 2022). In many developing contexts, including Nigeria, records officers and archival personnel often lack advanced skills in digitisation, metadata management, digital preservation, and archival appraisal (Aina & Moahi, 2020; Kazembe et al., 2021). This skills gap contributes to inconsistent application of best practices, and increases the risk of loss, damage or misclassification of records (South African Council for Archivists, 2022; Yakubu, 2022). Studies conducted within sub-Saharan African public sectors affirm that efficient records administration is constrained by inadequate facilities, poor policy implementation, and limited institutional commitment (Masoga & Ngulube, 2021; Muchiri & Ngulube, 2022). These conditions are mirrored in many public institutions in Cross River State, where physical repositories are outdated, digitisation infrastructure is limited, and archival policy is poorly enforced (Akpan & Etim, 2023).

Afolabi and Adeyemi (2022) observed that inconsistencies in records management practices often impede efficiency and transparency in Nigerian public institutions. Similarly, Ezeani and Okoye (2023) emphasized that gaps in systematic filing and record retention reduce accessibility and hinder evidence-based decision-making in governmental offices. Ezeani and Okoye (2023) further reveals that although there is some uniformity in basic records management practices (reflected in a low standard deviation), advanced procedures such as digital recordkeeping, automated filing systems, and archival integration are yet to be fully institutionalized.

Records management practices in public institutions in Cross River State often face significant challenges, with many organizations struggling to maintain high standards of recordkeeping. Similarly, the competency levels of staff involved in archival administration are often insufficient for effective management of institutional records. These issues reflect broader systemic problems, including inadequate staff training, weak enforcement of policies, and reliance on outdated recordkeeping systems (Ogbomo & Edogbanya, 2021; Mensah & Ofosu-Addo, 2020). Addressing these deficiencies requires improved infrastructural support, capacity building, and robust policy implementation to strengthen records management and archival administration in public institutions.

A critical understanding of the relationship between records systems, competency, and administrative performance is essential to reposition public institutions for improved governance and service delivery (ICA, 2020; Ngulube & Tafor, 2021). Strengthening records management and archival administration is not only a technical imperative but a strategic necessity for public accountability, reduction of information loss, and enhancement of institutional memory (Thompson, 2019; Babalola, 2020).

### **Objectives of the study**

The main objective of this study was to examine records management and archival administration in public institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. assess the extent to which records management practices are effectively carried out in public institutions in Cross River State.
2. determine the competency level of staff involved in archival administration in public institutions in Cross River state.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent are records management practices effectively carried out in public institutions in Cross River State?
2. What is the competency level of staff involved in archival administration in public institutions in Cross River State?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- H<sub>01</sub>:** Records management practices in public institutions in Cross River State are not significantly high.

**Ho2:** The competency level of staff involved in archival administration in public institutions in Cross River State is not significantly high.

### **Methodology**

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to systematically assess the current status of records management practices and archival administration in public institutions in Cross River State without manipulating any variable. The survey approach provided an opportunity to obtain first-hand information from records officers and archival personnel on existing practices, challenges, and staff competency levels in records and archival operations. The population of the study comprised records officers, administrative staff, and archival personnel working in selected public institutions in Cross River State. These institutions included the Cross River State Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance, Civil Service Commission, Local Government Service Commission, and the State Secretariat Registry in Calabar.

A census sampling technique was employed, involving the entire population of 62 staff across the sampled institutions. The census approach was adopted because the population size was manageable and allowed the researchers to obtain comprehensive data coverage and ensure that all relevant personnel involved in records and archival duties were adequately represented in the study. Data for this study were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Records Management and Archival Administration Questionnaire (RMAAQ), which comprised two sections. Section A measured records management practices with 8 items assessing filing systems, documentation procedures, retrieval efficiency, storage infrastructure, and policy implementation, while Section B measured staff competency in archival administration with 8 items covering archival procedures, preservation techniques, digital skills, and professional development. Respondents rated all items on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating more effective practices or greater competency. A four-point Likert scale was used to rate all items, where 1 represented Strongly Disagree and 4 represented Strongly Agree, with higher scores reflecting more effective practices or greater staff competency. Total scores for each section were interpreted as low (8–14), moderate (15–22), or high (23–32), and were further analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and t-test statistics to address the research questions and test the hypotheses.

The instrument was designed to elicit information on key aspects of records management and archival administration, such as records creation, storage, retrieval, preservation, staff

competency, availability of archival facilities, and policy implementation within public institutions. The questionnaire was validated by three experts in Library and Information Science to ensure content relevance and clarity. The reliability of the instrument was established through the Cronbach's alpha method, yielding coefficients ranging from 0.79 to 0.88, indicating a high level of internal consistency and suitability for the study. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. Population t-test statistics were employed to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. This was done to determine whether records management practices and staff competency in archival administration in public institutions in Cross River State were significantly high or not.

### Presentation of results

**Research question 1:** To what extent are records management practices effectively carried out in public institutions in Cross River State?

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics on extent of records management practices carried out in public institutions in Cross River State

Questionnaire section	No. of Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Records Management Practices	8	20.15	1.87	Moderately High

Table 1 indicated that records management practices were measured using questionnaire items 1–8, which assessed standardized filing systems, recordkeeping policies, documentation procedures, file maintenance, retrieval efficiency, and administrative compliance. The analysis revealed a mean score of 20.15 and a standard deviation of 1.87, indicating a moderately high level of records management practices across the sampled public institutions, including the Cross River State Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance, Civil Service Commission, Local Government Service Commission, and the State Secretariat Registry. This suggests that while most institutions have functional records systems in place, there remain gaps in policy enforcement, systematic filing procedures, and adoption of advanced digital records management techniques. The low standard deviation reflects a relatively uniform perception among respondents regarding records management practices across the institutions surveyed.

**Ho1:** Records management practices in public institutions in Cross River State are not significantly high.

**Table 2:** Population t-test analysis of records management practices

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Expected Mean	df	t-cal	p-val
Records management practices	62	20.15	1.87	16.00	61	10.23	.000

A one-sample t-test was conducted to test this hypothesis. The result, presented in Table 2, showed  $t = 10.23$ ,  $p < .05$ . Since the p-value (.000) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that the level of records management practices in public institutions in Cross River State is significantly high; meaning the institutions demonstrate measurable adherence to recordkeeping standards, though further improvements in digital records and policy enforcement are needed.

**Research question 2:** What is the competency level of staff involved in archival administration in public institutions in Cross River State?

**Table 3:** Descriptive statistics on competency level of staff involved in archival administration in public institutions in Cross River State

Questionnaire Section	Number of Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Archival Administration & Staff Competency	8	18.78	2.12	Moderate to High

The descriptive statistic from Table 3 indicated that archival administration and staff competency were measured using items 9–16, which focused on archival repository organization, preservation techniques, digital archiving skills, staff training, institutional support, and records retention policy implementation. The analysis yielded a mean score of 18.78 with a standard deviation of 2.12, indicating a moderate to high level of archival administration and staff competency. This finding suggests that while staff demonstrate reasonable knowledge of archival procedures, gaps still exist in advanced digital preservation, systematic recordkeeping, and continuous professional development. The

moderate variation in responses reflects differences in staff training and institutional support across the sampled public institutions.

**Ho2:** The competency level of staff involved in archival administration in public institutions in Cross River State is not significantly high.

**Table 4:** Population t-test analysis of archival administration and staff competency

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Expected Mean	df	t-cal	p-val
Archival administration & staff competency	62	18.78	2.12	16.00	61	7.42	.001

This hypothesis was also tested using a one-sample t-test. The result presented in Table 4, showed  $t = 7.42$ ,  $p < .05$ . Since the p-value (.001) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that archival administration and staff competency are significantly high, although there remains room for improvement in advanced archival skills, digital preservation techniques, and institutional support for effective records management.

### **Discussion of the findings**

The findings from hypothesis one indicated that records management practices in public institutions in Cross River State are significantly high, though not without limitations. While basic recordkeeping systems, filing procedures, and documentation policies exist across ministries and commissions including the Cross River State Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance, Civil Service Commission, Local Government Service Commission, and the State Secretariat Registry, there remain gaps in standardized policy enforcement, consistent documentation practices, and adoption of digital records management. This aligns with Afolabi and Adeyemi (2022), who observed that inconsistencies in records management practices often impede efficiency and transparency in Nigerian public institutions. Similarly, the result is in agreement with Ezeani and Okoye (2023) who emphasized that gaps in systematic filing and record retention reduce accessibility and hinder evidence-based decision-making in governmental offices. The study further reveals that although there is some uniformity in basic records management practices (reflected in a low standard deviation), advanced procedures such as digital recordkeeping, automated filing systems, and archival integration are yet to be fully institutionalized.

Findings from hypothesis two revealed that archival administration and staff competency are significantly high, yet there are noticeable differences in skill levels across institutions. While staff possess foundational knowledge in archival processes, advanced competencies in digital preservation, metadata management, and long-term record maintenance remain limited. This finding is consistent with Uzochukwu and Nnadi (2023), who reported that inadequate archival training among public sector staff compromises the sustainability and accessibility of records. Similarly, Nwosu (2022) highlights that institutional support including training opportunities, policy frameworks, and budget allocation is critical for effective archival administration in Nigerian government institutions. The variation in responses suggests that some institutions provide stronger professional development and guidance than others, underscoring the need for standardized training programmes and capacity-building initiatives. Effective archival administration, therefore, depends not only on staff competency but also on institutional backing and structured archival policies, which are essential for safeguarding public records and ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings, the study concludes that records management practices and archival administration in public institutions in Cross River State are significantly high but require further strengthening. Basic systems and staff competencies exist across sampled institutions, yet gaps remain in policy enforcement, digital records adoption, advanced archival skills, and institutional support mechanisms. Institutions with better-trained staff, clear policies, and adequate resources demonstrate higher effectiveness in records management and archival administration, ensuring the sustainability and accessibility of public records. To fully optimize records management and archival practices, public institutions should invest in advanced digital recordkeeping technologies, implement standardized archival policies, and provide continuous staff training. Such interventions will enhance accountability, transparency, and operational efficiency, ultimately improving service delivery and governance outcomes. Strengthening both human capacity and institutional support is essential to ensure that records and archives in Cross River State are preserved systematically and accessible for present and future administrative, legal, and research needs.

### **Recommendations**

Sequel to the research finding, these recommendations are made:

1. Public institutions in Cross River State should invest in the development and implementation of standardized records management policies, automated filing systems, and

digital archiving technologies.

2. Government agencies should provide continuous professional development programmes for staff involved in archival administration, focusing on advanced archival skills, digital preservation techniques, and metadata management.

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