

MANAGING THE END OF RECORD LIFECYCLE: ASSESSING CHALLENGES OF STUDENT RECORDS DISPOSAL PROCEDURES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN TABORA MUNICIPAL, TANZANIA

Musa Manyangu Migabo

Assistant Lecturer, Tanzania Public Service College (TPSC), Tabora Campus

Email: migmussa@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Education stakeholders have increasingly recognized that proper management of student records is essential for transparency, accountability, and administrative efficiency in secondary schools. This study investigates the procedures and practices used to manage the end of the student record lifecycle, with particular emphasis on the disposal of student records in secondary schools in Tabora Municipal, Tanzania. The study involved 35 participants, including heads of school, records officers, and teachers. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with heads of school and records officers and focus group discussions with teachers. The study adopted a qualitative research approach to gain a deep understanding of experiences, practices, and challenges in managing student records disposal. The findings indicated that the effective management of student record disposal in secondary schools was hindered by several factors. These include limited availability of clear disposal policies, low awareness of records management guidelines, inconsistent appraisal procedures, uneven compliance with national regulations, and inadequate storage facilities. Participants emphasized that having clear policies, training staff on records management, implementing systematic appraisal procedures, ensuring regulatory compliance, and providing secure storage facilities are critical measures for proper disposal of student records. The study further highlighted that collaboration among school administrators, records officers, teachers, and education authorities is essential to ensure integrity, efficiency, and trust in the management of student records. The study concludes that strengthening records disposal procedures will safeguard student information, improve administrative efficiency, and contribute to credible and accountable school management in Tabora Municipal.

Keywords: Student records, disposal procedures, records lifecycle, secondary schools, Tabora Municipal, Tanzania.

1.1 Introduction

Records are fundamental evidence of activities, decisions and transactions carried out within educational institutions. In secondary schools, student records provide crucial information on admissions, attendance, assessment results, personal details, and progression, and are essential for accountability, transparency and administrative efficiency (UNESCO, 2023). Effective records management involves a comprehensive life cycle approach, from creation and classification through maintenance, archiving and disposal (Records life-cycle, 2026). However, disposing of records at the end of their life cycle is one of the most neglected aspects of records management despite its importance in preserving privacy, reducing storage burdens, and ensuring compliance with legal and institutional requirements.

Studies show that poor records disposal practices negatively affect school administration by cluttering storage spaces, hindering information retrieval, and increasing operational costs. For example, research in secondary schools in Anambra State found that ineffective disposal of outdated records contributed to poor decision making and administrative inefficiencies (Gunasekara & Marasinghe, 2023). Disposal activities such as incineration, shredding or appropriate archiving directly influence the efficiency and effectiveness of records systems in educational settings (Gunasekara & Marasinghe, 2023). Across eastern African contexts, evidence also highlights that academic institutions often lack formal retention and disposal schedules, resulting in inconsistent or ad-hoc destruction of records (Kataike, 2024; Mnzava, 2019). In Tanzania, secondary schools similarly generate diverse student records but are

reported to lack structured retention and disposition procedures, primarily relying on manual filing systems without clear policies for end-of-life disposal (Mnzava, 2019).

Despite the proliferation of digital technologies in records management globally, many public organizations continue to depend on paper-based systems, which exacerbate challenges related to space, accessibility and security for records that have reached the end of their active life (Manase, Mwantimwa & Ndimbwa, 2024). The absence of disposal procedures and retention guidelines in school contexts also poses risks for privacy breaches and non-compliance with data protection standards, highlighting the need for systematic lifecycle management (UK Data Protection Guidance, 2021).

In Tanzania, guidelines on records management imply that records should be deposited in archives after ten years and disposed of according to statutory requirements, yet implementation at the school level remains weak and under-studied (Tanzania Education Authority, 2026). Given these gaps, there is limited empirical evidence on how student records disposal procedures are managed in secondary schools and how this affects overall records life cycle management. This study therefore seeks to assess current challenges of disposal practices in Tabora Municipal secondary schools to contribute to strengthening life cycle management records, enhance administrative efficiency, and safeguard student information.

1.2 Literature Review

In various educational contexts, scholars acknowledge that effective records management is critical for institutional efficiency, accountability, and compliance with legal and ethical standards (Ifinedo, 2022; Oyedemi & Chinyere, 2023). The records life cycle, which includes creation, use, maintenance, retention, and disposal, provides a framework for ensuring that records remain accessible when needed and are properly eliminated at the end of their useful life (Yeh & Smith, 2024). However, disposal procedures, especially for student records in schools, remain one of the least understood and least implemented components of records management (Adewale & Aina, 2023; Mgaya & Pius, 2025).

According to Ifinedo (2022), poor disposal practices often lead to unnecessary accumulation of outdated records, which increases storage costs, obstructs retrieval of relevant information, and poses institutional risks. In Ghana, Osei-Boateng and Coetzee (2023) found that secondary schools lacked formal retention schedules, resulting in inconsistent or unsupervised destruction of student files. Similarly, in Nigeria, Adewale and Aina (2023) reported that teachers and administrators often held on to obsolete records due to fear of accountability, lack of disposal policies, and uncertainty about regulatory requirements. These findings indicate that without clear disposal procedures, educational institutions may inadvertently compromise data privacy and institutional efficiency.

The advent of digital technology has intensified these challenges. While digital systems can improve access and preservation, they also create new disposal complexities, such as securely deleting electronic student data and protecting confidentiality (Sithole & Khumalo, 2024). Sithole and Khumalo's study in South African schools revealed that even when digital repositories are used, entities frequently lack documented disposal protocols, leading to duplicate records, outdated documents, and vulnerabilities to data breaches. Mgaya and Pius (2025) also noted that in Tanzanian secondary schools, although some institutions are adopting digital records systems, disposal practices have not been standardized, leaving gaps in end-of-life record management.

Legal and ethical frameworks play a significant role in shaping disposal procedures. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European context and similar data protection laws in Africa emphasize that records containing personal information should only be retained for as long as necessary and must be securely destroyed at the end of retention periods (Nyongesa & Mwaura, 2023). In Tanzania, the Records and Archives Management Act (2021) mandates systematic disposal of records according to approved schedules, yet empirical evidence suggests weak implementation at the school level (Mwakalobo & Lissu, 2026). This gap between policy and practice underscores the need for empirical assessment of disposal procedures in secondary schools.

Studies also highlight the implications of poor disposal on education quality and accountability. For example, Oyedemi and Chinyere (2023) demonstrated that schools without formal disposal procedures experienced delayed access to student transcripts, which hindered decision-making in admissions, transfers, and examinations. In contrast, schools that implemented structured retention and disposal schedules reported improved administrative efficiency and increased trust from stakeholders (Kariuki & Mwangi, 2024). These trends suggest that robust disposal practices are not merely administrative tasks but strategic enablers of school performance and stakeholder confidence.

Despite growing research on student records management, there is limited empirical literature addressing the challenges of records disposal in Tanzanian secondary schools. Most existing studies emphasize record keeping and storage while largely overlooking the evaluation and disposal of records at the end of their life cycle (Mgaya & Pius, 2025; Mwakalobo & Lissu, 2026). This study aims to address this gap by examining the procedures and challenges associated with the disposal of student records in secondary schools in Tabora Municipal. The findings are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of effective records life-cycle management within Tanzania's education system.

1.3 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore and assess the procedures for managing the end of the record lifecycle, with a specific focus on the disposal of student records in secondary schools in Tabora Municipal, Tanzania. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, practices, and perceptions of school heads, records officers, and teachers regarding student record disposal. This method allowed the researcher to capture rich and detailed insights into the strengths, weaknesses, and contextual challenges of disposal practices, which may not be fully revealed through quantitative methods.

Data was collected through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Interviews were conducted with heads of school and records officers to elicit detailed accounts of school record disposal policies, procedures, and compliance with regulatory requirements. This method provided flexibility, allowing interviewers to probe for clarification, follow up on emerging themes, and observe non-verbal cues that added depth to participants' verbal responses.

Focus group discussions were conducted with teachers to obtain varied perspectives on how student records are managed and ultimately disposed of at the end of their lifecycle. FGDs were chosen because they enable group interaction, which often stimulates discussion and encourages participants to reflect on shared experiences. This dynamic allowed for emerging ideas and comparisons across different teachers' understandings of disposal practices, contributing to richer data.

A total of 35 participants were purposively selected from secondary schools in Tabora Municipal. Each participating school contributed one head of school, one records officer, and five teachers, ensuring that a range of insights was obtained from administrative and instructional personnel who interact with student records in different capacities. Participants were selected based on their roles and direct involvement in student records management.

Data collection took place through five focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. Each focus group comprised five teachers, facilitating focused discussions while allowing all participants to contribute meaningfully. Interviews were conducted with five heads of schools and five records officers. All interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim to accurately capture the information shared.

The collected qualitative data were analyzed thematically, enabling the identification of patterns, practices, and issues regarding student record disposal procedures. This methodological framework provided comprehensive insights into how student records disposal is implemented in practice and the perceived effects of current disposal practices on record lifecycle management in secondary schools.

3. Data Analysis Process

The data collected from interviews with heads of school and records officers, as well as focus group discussions with teachers, were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021). This approach involved identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) emerging from the qualitative data. The process included familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, generating initial codes, grouping related codes into broader themes, and interpreting these themes in relation to student records disposal procedures in secondary schools. The identified themes were then described and supported with direct quotations from participants to illustrate their experiences and perspectives.

Before commencing data collection, a research permit was obtained from Tabora Municipal authorities to ensure that the study complied with institutional research requirements. In addition, informed consent was signed by the participants. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study by ensuring confidentiality of the information collected and maintaining the anonymity of all participants during data analysis and reporting.

4. Results

Several issues emerged from the interviews with heads of schools and records officers, as well as the focus group discussions with teachers, regarding the procedures and practices used in managing the end of the student record lifecycle, particularly the disposal of student records in secondary schools in Tabora Municipal, Tanzania. These issues highlight the existing practices, challenges, and compliance with established records management guidelines in schools. The findings are discussed in the following sections.

4.1 Availability of records disposal policies

The findings revealed that the absence of specific written policies within schools sometimes led to uncertainty about the correct procedures to follow when disposing of student records. As a result, some schools tended to keep records longer than necessary, while others disposed of them without following formal procedures. Participants emphasized the importance of having clear and accessible policies to guide school staff in managing and disposing of student records properly. One respondent explained:

If there were clear policies available at the school level, it would be easier for staff responsible for records to know when and how student records should be disposed of' (Interview, Records Officer).

4.2 Awareness of records management guidelines

The findings revealed that awareness of records management regulations played a significant role in ensuring proper disposal of student records. The participants during interviews and focus group discussions noted that when school administrators and records officers understood the required procedures, they were more likely to follow appropriate steps during records appraisal and disposal. However, some participants indicated that limited knowledge of official procedures sometimes led to improper handling or delayed disposal of records. The participant gave the following explanations:

Awareness of records management guidelines helps school administrators and records officers understand how long student records should be kept and the proper procedures for disposing of them once they are no longer required (Interview, Head of School).

4.3 Procedures for records appraisal

The findings revealed that that many schools did not have clear or systematic procedures for appraising records before disposal. In some cases, decisions about which records to keep or dispose of were made based on experience or immediate storage needs rather than formal appraisal guidelines. This situation sometimes resulted in the accumulation of unnecessary records or uncertainty about which documents should be retained for accountability purposes. One participant explained:

In many cases, we keep most records for a long time because we are not always sure which ones should be disposed of and which ones should be preserved for future reference (Interview, Head of School).

4.4 Compliance with records management regulations

Participants explained that compliance with records management regulations was sometimes limited due to inadequate knowledge of the required procedures, lack of clear written guidelines at the school level, and insufficient monitoring from responsible authorities. As a result, some schools disposed of records without strictly following the established standards, while others continued to store records for long periods due to uncertainty about the legal requirements. One participant explained:

Sometimes schools are not fully aware of the national regulations regarding records disposal, so records are either kept for too long or disposed of without following the proper procedures (Interview, Records Officer).

4.5 Availability of storage facilities for records

The findings revealed that storage facilities in several schools were limited and sometimes not secured enough to preserve records properly. Due to the shortage of storage space, some records were kept in offices, shelves, or boxes where they might be exposed to damage, loss, or unauthorized access. Participants also explained that the accumulation of records over time created congestion in available storage spaces, making it difficult to manage and retrieve records efficiently. One participant noted:

In this school there is no specific room for keeping student records, so files are kept in offices or other available spaces, which sometimes makes it difficult to manage them properly (Focus Group Discussion with Teachers).

5. Discussion

This study found that managing the end of the student record lifecycle is a critical aspect of school administration in secondary schools in Tabora Municipal, Tanzania, and that various measures need to be put in place to ensure proper disposal of student records. The findings revealed that the availability of records disposal policies was limited in many schools. Some schools followed general guidelines provided by education authorities, but these were often not clearly documented or accessible at the school level. Participants explained that having clear disposal policies would guide school staff on how and when to dispose of student records, thus preventing unnecessary accumulation or improper destruction. These findings are consistent with Mgaya and Pius (2025) who argue that formalized records disposal policies help schools manage records efficiently and reduce the risk of data loss or unauthorized access.

The study further indicated that awareness of records management guidelines among heads of school, records officers, and teachers was generally low. Most respondents noted that inadequate knowledge of official procedures sometimes led to improper handling or delayed disposal of student records. This finding aligns with Adewale and Aina (2023), who observed that awareness of records management regulations is essential for proper recordkeeping and ensures that records are disposed of in compliance with institutional and legal standards. Participants emphasized that training and sensitization of staff on records management guidelines would improve compliance and reduce errors in disposal practices.

Regarding procedures for records appraisal, the findings revealed that schools often lacked systematic methods for deciding which records to retain or dispose of. Some records, such as academic transcripts, were retained for extended periods due to their importance, whereas other routine administrative records were disposed of based on convenience rather than formal appraisal. This is consistent with Osei-Boateng and Coetzee (2023) who reported that structured appraisal procedures are essential for distinguishing between records of enduring value and those that have fulfilled their administrative purpose.

The study also found that compliance with records management regulations was uneven across schools. While some schools attempted to adhere to national and institutional guidelines, many struggled due to inadequate knowledge, limited supervision, and absence of clear enforcement mechanisms. Participants indicated that non-compliance could result in records being stored for excessive periods or disposed of improperly. These findings corroborate the observations of Mwakalobo and Lissu (2026), who argue that adherence to records management legislation is crucial for ensuring accountability and protecting sensitive information in Tanzanian institutions.

Finally, the study revealed that availability of storage facilities for records was a challenge. Although some schools had designated storage rooms or cabinets, many lacked adequate and secure spaces, leading to congestion and potential damage or loss of student records. Participants highlighted that inadequate storage complicated record retrieval and disposal processes. This finding aligns with Sithole and Khumalo (2024), who emphasize that proper storage infrastructure is critical for maintaining the integrity and accessibility of records throughout their lifecycle.

Overall, the study shows that effective management of the end of the student record lifecycle in secondary schools requires the availability of clear disposal policies, staff awareness of records management guidelines, systematic appraisal procedures, compliance with regulations, and adequate storage facilities. Strengthening these areas will help schools manage records efficiently, safeguard student information, and ensure proper disposal practices.

6. Conclusion

Effective management of the end of the student record lifecycle is a critical aspect of school administration in secondary schools. The findings of this study have shown that there are several gaps in the disposal of student records, including limited availability of clear disposal policies, low awareness of records management guidelines, inconsistent appraisal procedures, varying compliance with national regulations, and inadequate storage facilities. These gaps highlight the need for schools to strengthen their records management practices to ensure that student records are properly retained, securely stored, and disposed of in accordance with established standards.

The study further emphasizes that improving records management requires collaboration among school administrators, records officers, teachers, and relevant education authorities. Such coordinated efforts will ensure that schools implement proper disposal procedures, maintain the integrity of student records, and comply with legal and institutional requirements. Addressing these issues will enhance accountability, safeguard student information, and promote trust in the management of school records, ultimately contributing to more efficient and credible educational institutions in Tabora Municipal.

References

- Adewale, B., & Aina, L. (2023). Records retention and disposal practices in secondary schools: Challenges and prospects in southwestern Nigeria. *Records Management Journal*, 33(1), 45–59.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications.
- Gunasekara, P., & Marasinghe, M. (2023). Records management challenges in secondary schools: Disposal practices and administrative efficiencies. *Journal of Education Administration and Policy*, 12(3), 45–60.
- Ifinedo, P. (2022). Institutional records management practices in educational settings: A systematic review. *International Journal of Information Management*, 62, 102458.
- Kariuki, J., & Mwangi, R. (2024). Retention and disposal schedules as tools for efficient records management in Kenyan secondary schools. *East African Journal of Library and Information Science*, 9(2), 78–92.
- Kataike, K. (2024). Retention and disposal schedules in East African academic institutions: A comparative study. *East African Journal of Library and Information Science*, 8(2), 89–105.
- Manase, F., Mwantimwa, K., & Ndimbwa, R. (2024). Digital versus paper-based records management in public institutions: Implications for accessibility and security. *African Journal of Information Management*, 10(4), 123–138.
- Mgaya, T., & Pius, F. (2025). Adoption of digital records systems in Tanzanian secondary schools: Opportunities and bottlenecks in lifecycle management. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 8(1), 23–41.
- Mnzava, S. (2019). Records management practices in Tanzanian secondary schools: Challenges and prospects. *Journal of Education and Administration*, 7(1), 77–95.

- Mwakalobo, M., & Lissu, M. (2026). Implementation of the Records and Archives Management Act (RAMA 2021) in Tanzanian public institutions: Gaps and opportunities. *Archives and Manuscripts*, 54(1), 112–130.
- Nyongesa, H., & Mwaura, J. (2023). Data protection law and records disposal in African educational institutions. *Journal of Information, Law and Technology*, 3(5), 1–18.
- Osei-Boateng, S., & Coetzee, R. (2023). Student record retention and disposal practices in Ghanaian secondary schools. *Library Management*, 44(4/5), 210–227.
- Oyedemi, T., & Chinyere, C. (2023). Record management inefficiencies and educational outcomes in Nigerian secondary schools. *School Administrative Studies*, 15(3), 102–119.
- Records Life-Cycle. (2026). In *encyclopedia of information governance*. Global Records Management Society.
- Sithole, N., & Khumalo, L. (2024). Digital records and disposal procedures: A study of secondary schools in South Africa. *African Journal of Information Systems*, 16(2), 88–103.
- Tanzania Education Authority. (2026). *Guidelines for records management in educational institutions*. Government Printers.
- UK Data Protection Guidance. (2021). *Managing records and data protection compliance*. Information Commissioner's Office.
- UNESCO. (2023). *Guidelines for school records management: Supporting transparency and accountability*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- UNESCO. (2023). *Records management guidelines for educational institutions*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.