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Abstract
Effective records management has emerged as a strategic approach in developing countries to enhance public sector governance and service delivery through improved accountability, transparency, informed decision-making and regulatory compliance. However, this shift presents a paradox while aimed at empowering institutions through legal frameworks, digitisation initiatives, and decentralisation of records responsibilities, these reforms often exacerbate existing weaknesses in capacity, infrastructure, funding, and enforcement, ultimately undermining transparency and efficient service delivery. This study examined the challenges affecting effective management of records in Tanzania's public sector, drawing on case studies from Kinondoni Municipal Council, Singida Local Authorities, procurement units, the President's Office, Ethics Secretariat, and other institutions, employing a systematic literature review and case study analysis. Key findings indicated that records management can support good governance and service delivery, but its effectiveness is frequently constrained by low awareness of legal frameworks, human resource and skills gaps, inadequate technological infrastructure, security and confidentiality risks, and weak enforcement mechanisms. These challenges mirror experiences across Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, and Uganda. The research highlights the importance of strengthening local institutional capabilities, investing in ICT infrastructure, fostering staff training, and enhancing accountability frameworks. Limitations include reliance on secondary English-language sources and selected case studies that may not capture all regional variations. The study recommends comprehensive capacity-building programmes, sustained resource allocation, stronger policy enforcement, and active stakeholder engagement to ensure equitable and effective records management outcomes. By acknowledging this paradox, policymakers can better design and implement reforms, ultimately transforming records management into a cornerstone of good governance and improved public service delivery in Tanzania.

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of effective governance, transparency, and improved public service delivery has increasingly led public sector institutions in developing countries to prioritise robust records management practices (Mosweu & Rakemane, 2020; Franks, 2025; Kashaija et al., 2024). Strong records management systems are essential for supporting evidence-based decision-making, ensuring accountability, facilitating timely access to information, promoting regulatory compliance, and contributing to the fight against corruption (Thomas, 2024; Yusuf et al., 2023; Newray, 2023; Kashaija et al., 2024).

In Tanzania, successive governments have introduced various reforms, including the establishment of legal and policy frameworks, the gradual adoption of electronic records management systems (ERMS), and the decentralisation of records responsibilities to local government authorities, all aimed at modernising information handling and enhancing service delivery.

However, this shift presents a paradox: while these initiatives are designed to empower institutions, professionalise practices, and improve governance outcomes, they have often exacerbated existing weaknesses in infrastructure, human capacity, funding, and enforcement mechanisms. As a result, records management remains ineffective in many public offices, ultimately undermining transparency, accountability, and efficient service delivery (Kachota, 2023; Rutta & Ndenje-Sichalwe, 2021; Mwasenga, 2021).

This paradox is clearly illustrated in Tanzania's public sector. Although legal and regulatory frameworks for records management exist, awareness among staff in Local Government Authorities remains low, significantly limiting the potential for improved practices (Mzigo et al., 2025). Empirical evidence from Kinondoni Municipal Council in Dar es Salaam reveals that records management practices are generally weak, with serious deficiencies in classification, storage, retrieval, and disposal systems (Rutta & Ndenje-Sichalwe, 2021). In procurement units across the country, multiple institutional and operational factors continue to compromise the quality of record keeping (Mwasenga, 2021). Efforts to transition to electronic systems have encountered notable challenges, particularly in safeguarding the security and confidentiality of sensitive information, as documented in the President's Office (Kaporo, 2024). Meanwhile, records management programmes in Singida Local Authorities demonstrate a clear linkage to good governance and service delivery, yet they remain severely constrained by inadequate resources, skills gaps, and implementation shortfalls (Kashaija et al., 2024; Thomas, 2024).

Comparable challenges characterise records management across other developing countries in Africa. In Kenya, weak records management practices in county governments have been shown to hinder the tendering process and delay land administration services (Njue et al., 2021; Taurus & Wamae, 2022). South African municipalities and public health institutions continue to struggle with the management of both paper-based and electronic records, resulting in inefficiencies, audit failures, and compliance gaps (Makgahlela & Nsibirwa, 2021; Matlala & Maphoto, 2022; Makgahlela, 2021). Nigerian public universities and other public institutions face persistent barriers related to insufficient infrastructure, inadequate training, and weak institutional commitment (Muhammad et al., 2021). Across the continent, common impediments include limited funding, a shortage of skilled personnel, resistance to digital transformation, and weak enforcement of records management policies (Mosweu & Rakemane, 2020; Chikomba et al., 2021; Ekwaro & Luyombya, 2024).

This paper seeks to examine the challenges affecting the effective management of records in the public sector in Tanzania. By drawing on recent empirical studies conducted within the country and comparative insights from other African nations, it aims to navigate this paradox, analyse the underlying causes, and propose practical, context-specific strategies for strengthening records management systems to ultimately support improved governance and public service delivery.

METHOD

The study utilised a systematic literature review and case study analysis to examine the challenges affecting effective management of records in the public sector in Tanzania. This approach allows for both a comprehensive synthesis of existing empirical evidence and an in-depth understanding of contextual realities in Tanzanian institutions.

Systematic Literature Review

A systematic literature review was conducted to synthesise existing research on records management practices and challenges in Tanzania's public sector. The review focused on peer-reviewed articles, doctoral dissertations, master's theses, and institutional reports published between 2010 and 2025. Comprehensive searches were performed across major academic databases and repositories, including Google Scholar, Scopus, JSTOR, and the Institute of Accountancy Arusha (IAA) repository, utilising targeted combinations of keywords such as "records management", "public sector", "challenges", "Tanzania", "local government", "electronic records management", and "service delivery".

A set of inclusion criteria was established to ensure rigour. Selected studies were required to focus explicitly on records management in Tanzania's public sector or provide relevant comparative insights from other African countries. Studies that were purely theoretical or lacked empirical findings were excluded. After applying the inclusion criteria, 38 relevant sources were identified and critically examined. This review was structured to identify recurring themes such as legal frameworks, human resource capacity, infrastructure, digitisation challenges, and governance issues.

Case Study Selection

In addition to the systematic literature review, the study incorporated case studies of selected Tanzanian public institutions that have been the subject of recent empirical research. The cases were purposively selected based on their representativeness and the richness of available data. Key institutions examined include Kinondoni Municipal Council (Dar es Salaam), Singida Local Authorities, the President's Office, Ethics Secretariat, and various procurement units across public entities. Each case study involved a qualitative analysis of existing empirical studies, government reports, policy documents, and academic research. Particular attention was given to the evolution of records management practices, specific challenges encountered, and the impact on service delivery and governance.

The data from the literature review and case studies were subjected to thematic analysis. This analytical framework involved coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the major challenges of records management in the Tanzanian public sector. The focus was on dimensions such as institutional capacity, legal and policy frameworks, technological infrastructure, human resource competencies, and security issues. A comparative analysis was also performed to draw insights between Tanzanian experiences and selected cases from other African countries (Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, and Uganda) to provide a broader contextual understanding.

Although the methodological framework adopted for this study is comprehensive, several limitations must be acknowledged. The study relies primarily on secondary data and existing empirical research, which may not capture the most recent developments beyond 2025. Additionally, the heavy reliance on English-language publications and the specific case studies selected may not fully represent the diversity of records management practices across all Tanzanian public institutions. Nevertheless, the combination of systematic literature review and targeted case study analysis provides a robust foundation for understanding the challenges and proposing practical recommendations.

RESULTS

This study revealed the multifaceted dynamics of records management challenges in Tanzania's public sector, highlighting persistent barriers despite ongoing policy reforms, legal frameworks, and decentralisation efforts. Through a detailed evaluation of empirical case studies from Kinondoni Municipal Council (Dar es Salaam), Singida Local Authorities, procurement units across public entities, the President's Office – Ethics Secretariat, and various Local Government Authorities (LGAs), combined with comparative insights from Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, Uganda, and other African countries, we identify five interconnected themes that capture the paradoxes and complexities of records management practices. These themes demonstrate that while records management is intended to strengthen governance and service delivery, systemic weaknesses in awareness, capacity, infrastructure, security, and enforcement often turn reforms into sources of inefficiency and inequity.

Awareness and Compliance with Records Management Legal Frameworks

In Tanzania, comprehensive legal and policy frameworks for records management exist, yet awareness among frontline staff in Local Government Authorities remains alarmingly low, severely undermining implementation and compliance. Mzigo et al. (2025) found that a significant proportion of LGA officers are unfamiliar with key provisions of the national records management legislation, including classification schemes, retention schedules, and disposal procedures. This lack of awareness results in haphazard record-keeping practices, inconsistent application of policies, and frequent non-compliance during audits. The situation is compounded in rural LGAs, where training opportunities are limited, and staff turnover is high, creating a cycle of ignorance and poor practice.

Empirical evidence from Kinondoni Municipal Council reinforces this finding. Rutta and Ndenje-Sichalwe (2021) reported that records management practices were generally weak, with serious deficiencies in classification, storage, retrieval, and disposal systems directly attributable to low awareness and inadequate enforcement of existing regulations. In Singida Local Authorities, although records management programmes were explicitly linked to improved governance and service delivery, Kashaija et al. (2024) observed that weak awareness among officers limited the programmes' potential impact, leading to delays in service delivery and reduced accountability. These Tanzanian cases illustrate the paradox: legal frameworks are in place, yet without sustained awareness-raising, they remain largely symbolic.

Similar awareness and compliance gaps characterise public sectors across Africa. In Kenya, county governments struggle with an inadequate understanding of records management regulations, which directly hampers tendering processes and land administration (Njue et al., 2021; Taurus & Wamae, 2022). South African municipalities with adverse audit opinions consistently exhibit poor compliance due to limited awareness at operational levels (Makgahlela & Nsibirwa, 2021; Makgahlela, 2021). Nigerian public universities face parallel challenges, where staff ignorance of records policies contributes to fragmented management practices (Muhammad et al., 2021). Collectively, these findings underscore that legal frameworks alone are insufficient; continuous capacity-building and enforcement mechanisms are essential to translate policy into practice.

Human Resource Capacity and Skills Gaps

Human resource deficiencies represent one of the most pervasive challenges to effective records management in Tanzania's public sector. Kachota (2023) identified inadequate training, acute shortages of qualified records officers, and low staff motivation as primary factors hindering performance across public institutions. Officers often juggle records responsibilities with other administrative duties, leading to errors in classification, retrieval

delays, and premature disposal of vital documents. In procurement units, Mwasenga (2021) documented that staff frequently lack specialised skills in modern records classification and electronic systems, resulting in poor-quality record keeping that compromises procurement transparency and accountability.

Personnel records management in Local Government Authorities is further undermined by limited information-sharing practices stemming from these skills gaps. Thomas (2024) revealed that inadequate training prevents effective management of sensitive personnel files, which in turn affects human resource decision-making and service delivery. In Singida, Kashaija et al. (2024) emphasised that the absence of continuous professional development programmes leaves local officials ill-equipped to handle both paper-based and emerging digital records, perpetuating inefficiencies.

These capacity constraints are mirrored throughout the continent. Nigerian public universities suffer chronic shortages of trained records personnel, resulting in fragmented and unreliable systems (Muhammad et al., 2021). South African municipalities in Limpopo province exhibit similar skills deficits, directly contributing to repeated audit failures and adverse opinions (Makgahlela & Nsibirwa, 2021; Makgahlela, 2021). In Uganda, commercial banks undergoing modernisation face comparable challenges, where staff skills gaps slow the transition to digital records (Ekwaro & Luyombya, 2024). The studies consistently demonstrate that without deliberate investment in training and professionalisation of records staff, decentralised records responsibilities become a liability rather than an asset for governance.

Infrastructure, Technological and Resource Allocation Challenges

Infrastructure and technological limitations severely constrain records management, particularly as institutions attempt to transition from paper-based to electronic systems. Kaporo (2024) highlighted significant infrastructural deficiencies, including unreliable electricity, inadequate ICT hardware, and insufficient bandwidth at the President's Office, Ethics Secretariat, which undermine attempts at secure electronic records management. In Singida Local Authorities and other LGAs, Kashaija et al. (2024) noted poor storage facilities, frequent power outages, and chronic underfunding for digitisation initiatives. Centralised resource allocation further exacerbates the problem, as local institutions receive minimal budgetary support to modernise their records infrastructure (Rutta & Ndenje-Sichalwe, 2021).

Procurement units face additional hurdles, with Mwasenga (2021) documenting that outdated filing systems and a lack of dedicated records management software lead to misplaced files and delayed decision-making. Kachota (2023) similarly observed that resource constraints at the national level leave many public offices reliant on manual, paper-based systems that are vulnerable to damage, loss, and inefficiency. These infrastructural gaps create a vicious cycle as poor technology discourages digitisation, while continued reliance on paper systems increases physical storage demands and operational costs.

Comparative evidence from other African countries reveals identical patterns. Kenyan county governments report parallel technological barriers in land records digitisation, resulting in service delivery delays (Taurus & Wamae, 2022). Ugandan commercial banks and Zimbabwean financial parastatals struggle with outdated infrastructure during digital transformation efforts (Ekwaro & Luyombya, 2024; Chikomba et al., 2021). South African public health institutions and municipalities face resource constraints that hinder effective management of electronic records, often leading to compliance failures (Matlala & Maphoto, 2022; Makgahlela & Nsibirwa, 2021). Across these contexts, fiscal dependency on central government transfers and weak local

revenue generation capacity emerge as structural barriers that prevent meaningful technological advancement in records management.

Security, Confidentiality and Impact on Governance

Security and confidentiality concerns are particularly acute in the management of records, especially electronic records. Kaporo (2024) exposed serious vulnerabilities in protecting public leaders' confidential information within electronic systems at the President's Office, including weak access controls, inadequate encryption, and poor disposal protocols. These gaps expose institutions to data breaches, unauthorised access, and compliance violations. In personnel records management, Thomas (2024) found that weak information-sharing safeguards compromise confidentiality and erode public trust. Similarly, Kashaija et al. (2024) linked poor record security in Singida to reduced accountability and opportunities for corruption.

The broader governance implications are profound, ineffective records management directly undermines transparency, facilitates mismanagement of public resources, and weakens service delivery. Rutta and Ndenje-Sichalwe (2021) and Mwasenga (2021) both demonstrated how poor record practices in municipal and procurement settings lead to audit queries, delayed procurement processes, and diminished public confidence. Without robust security measures, the potential benefits of digitisation are negated, turning technological reforms into new sources of risk.

These security challenges resonate across Africa. Zimbabwean financial parastatals report similar vulnerabilities in digital records management (Chikomba et al., 2021), while South African public sector institutions grapple with confidentiality risks in cloud-based systems (Shibambu & Marutha, 2022). Mosweu and Rakemane (2020) argue that weak records management continent-wide continues to enable corruption and inefficiency, while studies in Kenya and Nigeria highlight how security lapses in records systems compromise tendering integrity and public service delivery (Njue et al., 2021; Muhammad et al., 2021). The evidence clearly shows that security is not a peripheral issue but a core determinant of whether records management supports or undermines good governance.

Comparative Insights on Records Management Challenges

Across the case studies, a clear pattern emerges that the effectiveness of records management in decentralised public sectors depends heavily on contextual factors such as local institutional capacity, political commitment, fiscal resources, and alignment between central policies and local realities. In Tanzania, as in Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, and Uganda, decentralisation has shifted greater record-keeping responsibilities to local levels without commensurate support, resulting in widened disparities between urban and rural institutions and persistent implementation gaps (Rutta & Ndenje-Sichalwe, 2021; Njue et al., 2021; Makgahlela & Nsibirwa, 2021; Muhammad et al., 2021; Ekwaro & Luyombya, 2024). In addition, political patronage, fiscal dependency on central transfers, and weak enforcement mechanisms further compound these challenges (Mosweu & Rakemane, 2020; Katuu, 2023; Matlala & Maphoto, 2022).

The findings indicate that digitisation and legal reforms hold genuine potential, yet their success hinges on simultaneous and sustained investments in staff training, modern infrastructure, and accountability frameworks. Without addressing these interconnected barriers, records management will continue to act as a bottleneck rather than an enabler of good governance and efficient public service delivery.

CONCLUSION

The evaluation of challenges affecting effective management of records in the public sector in Tanzania reveals a complex interplay of policy intentions, persistent implementation barriers, and contextual realities. While legal and policy frameworks, digitisation initiatives, and the decentralisation of records responsibilities have been envisaged as mechanisms to enhance accountability, transparency, informed decision-making, and efficient public service delivery, the empirical evidence from Kinondoni Municipal Council, Singida Local Authorities, procurement units, the President's Office – Ethics Secretariat, and other institutions demonstrates that without adequate support systems, capacity-building, and enforcement mechanisms, these reforms often exacerbate inefficiencies, security vulnerabilities, compliance gaps, and governance weaknesses. The recurring themes of low staff awareness, human resource and skills deficits, inadequate infrastructure and funding, and confidentiality risks mirrored across Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, and other African countries underscore that records management reforms alone are insufficient without addressing underlying structural and institutional constraints.

By acknowledging this paradox, policymakers, public sector leaders, and records professionals can better design and implement holistic, context-specific strategies. Comprehensive capacity-building programmes, sustained investment in ICT infrastructure, strengthened legal enforcement, and active community and stakeholder engagement are essential to ensure equitable and effective records management outcomes. Ultimately, transforming records management from a source of systemic challenges into a foundation for good governance will significantly improve public service delivery and accountability across Tanzania's public sector.

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