

Non-Teaching Staff Handling of Students' Records and Data Confidentiality in Rivers State Owned Universities

Yellowe Annette N. PhD* Nwuke ThankGod James PhD**

Department of Educational Management, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Nigeria*

Institute of Education, Rivers State University, Nigeria**

annette.yellowe@gmail.com

thankgod.nwuke@ust.edu.ng

Abstract: This study investigated the relationship between non-teaching staff handling of students' records and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. A correlational research design was adopted. The population comprised 1,840 non-teaching staff drawn from Rivers State University (RSU) and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE). Using the Taro Yamane formula at a margin of error of 0.05, a sample of 330 respondents was obtained and proportionately allocated across the two institutions using stratified random sampling. Two researcher-designed instruments, the Non-Teaching Staff Records Handling Questionnaire (NTSRHQ) and the Data Confidentiality Scale (DCS), were used for data collection. Both instruments adopted a four-point Likert scale. The test-retest reliability method yielded Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficients of 0.83 (NTSRHQ) and 0.79 (DCS), confirming high reliability. Data were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed moderate positive relationships between records management and data confidentiality ($r = .512$), data security practices and data confidentiality ($r = .574$), and confidentiality practices and data confidentiality ($r = .548$). All three null hypotheses were rejected. The study concluded that the capacity of non-teaching staff to manage student records, apply data security measures, and adhere to confidentiality practices is significantly associated with the overall integrity of data confidentiality in Rivers State universities. It is recommended that university authorities institutionalise regular training programmes for non-teaching staff in records and data management, establish robust data security infrastructure, and enforce formal confidentiality frameworks across all registry and administrative departments.

Keywords: Non-teaching Staff, Students' Records, Records Management, Data Security, Data Confidentiality, University Administration, Rivers State.

INTRODUCTION

The administration of universities in Nigeria depends heavily on the effective management of institutional records and the protection of sensitive data generated through teaching, research, and student affairs. Among the categories of university personnel whose work is most directly implicated in these processes are non-teaching staff, whose roles in registry offices, academic departments, student affairs units, and information technology divisions bring them into daily contact with students' academic records, personal data, and confidential institutional information. Despite their centrality to the administrative architecture of universities, non-teaching staff have received comparatively little scholarly attention in relation to their records management competencies and their adherence to data confidentiality obligations (Amadi & Obi, 2020). This gap is particularly consequential in the Rivers State university context, where growing student enrolment, increasing digitisation of administrative processes, and heightened public awareness of data rights have placed new demands on the capacity of universities to safeguard the integrity and confidentiality of student records.

Students' records encompass a broad range of information generated, collected, and

stored by universities in the course of their operations, including academic transcripts, examination results, personal biodata, financial records, health information, disciplinary histories, and correspondence between students and university administration. The proper handling of these records is not merely an administrative obligation; it is a matter of institutional ethics, legal compliance, and the fundamental rights of students to informational privacy and dignity. Eze and Nwosu (2021) observed that the improper handling of student records in Nigerian universities has led to incidents of grade falsification, unauthorised disclosure of personal information, and the exploitation of vulnerable students whose records are accessible to unscrupulous administrative staff. Such incidents erode institutional trust, expose universities to legal liability, and inflict direct harm on the students whose private information is compromised.

Records management refers to the systematic and organised processes through which institutional records are created, classified, stored, retrieved, maintained, and ultimately disposed of in accordance with established institutional policies and professional standards. In university settings, effective records management requires that non-teaching staff possess the technical skills, procedural knowledge, and professional integrity necessary to ensure that student records are accurate, accessible to authorised personnel, and protected from unauthorised access or manipulation (Okafor & Tamuno, 2019). Data security practices encompass the technical and administrative measures deployed to protect institutional data from unauthorised access, loss, corruption, or theft, including password management, access control systems, secure storage protocols, and response mechanisms for data breaches. Confidentiality practices refer to the behavioural and procedural norms that govern the disclosure and sharing of sensitive information, including adherence to professional codes of conduct, informed consent principles, and regulatory frameworks for data privacy (Nwachukwu & George, 2022).

In Rivers State, the two state-owned universities, namely Rivers State University (RSU) and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE), collectively serve a large and diverse student population drawn from across the geopolitical zone. Administrative staffs in these institutions manage vast quantities of student data, yet evidence suggests that formal training in records management and data protection is inconsistently provided, and that institutional policies governing the handling and confidentiality of student records are unevenly implemented (Peterside & Amadi, 2023). The absence of robust data confidentiality frameworks in these institutions creates conditions in which student records are vulnerable to mishandling, and in which non-teaching staff may lack the knowledge and institutional support needed to fulfil their data protection obligations effectively. It is against this background that the present study investigated the relationship between non-teaching staff handling of students' records, operationalised through records management, data security practices, and confidentiality practices, and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The integrity of student records and the confidentiality of institutional data represent foundational requirements of ethical university governance. However, in Rivers State owned universities, these requirements are imperfectly met, and the roles of non-teaching staff in producing or undermining data confidentiality outcomes remain empirically underexplored. Non-teaching staff in registry, academic affairs, and student services units handle sensitive student records on a daily basis, yet reports of records mismanagement, unauthorised access to student data, and inadequate adherence to data protection protocols point to systemic weaknesses in how these responsibilities are exercised (Eze & Nwosu, 2021). Specific concerns include the absence of standardised records management procedures, the inadequacy of data security infrastructure, and the lack of formal confidentiality training for non-teaching staff in many university departments. Nwachukwu and George (2022) found that a significant proportion of non-teaching staff in Nigerian universities had received no formal orientation on data privacy obligations, leaving them ill-equipped to navigate the

complex confidentiality responsibilities their roles entail. Despite the practical urgency of this problem, empirical evidence on the specific relationships between records management capacity, data security practices, confidentiality practices, and overall data confidentiality outcomes in Rivers State universities is limited. This study therefore sought to fill this gap by empirically investigating the relationship between non-teaching staff handling of students' records and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between non-teaching staff handling of students' records and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

Examine the relationship between records management by non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities.

Determine the relationship between data security practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities.

Ascertain the relationship between confidentiality practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

What is the relationship between records management by non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities?

What is the relationship between data security practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities?

What is the relationship between confidentiality practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities?

Hypotheses

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

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between records management by non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between data security practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between confidentiality practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Information Accountability Theory (Weitzner et al., 2008)

This study is anchored on Information Accountability Theory, as developed by Weitzner, Abelson, Berners-Lee, Feigenbaum, Hendler, and Sussman (2008). Information Accountability Theory argues that the management of personal and institutional data should be governed by the principle of accountability, under which every individual or organisation that handles data is obligated to act within clearly defined and auditable rules, and to be answerable for any deviation from those rules. The theory moves beyond traditional information security approaches that rely primarily on access restriction, arguing instead that it is the existence of clear accountability frameworks, combined with the institutional capacity to audit data-handling behaviour that most effectively ensures the integrity and confidentiality of institutional information. Under this framework, data handlers are required to act in ways that are justifiable, transparent, and consistent with the data governance obligations of their institutional roles.

The relevance of Information Accountability Theory to the present study lies in its direct application to the roles and responsibilities of non-teaching staff as institutional data handlers within university administrative systems. Non-teaching staff who manage student records are not merely performing clerical functions; they are acting as institutional data custodians whose behaviour has direct implications for the privacy rights of students and the governance integrity of the university. When non-teaching staff follow established records

management procedures, apply appropriate data security measures, and adhere to confidentiality protocols, they are fulfilling the accountability obligations that Information Accountability Theory prescribes. Conversely, when staff deviate from these obligations, whether through negligence, inadequate training, or the absence of institutional accountability frameworks, data confidentiality is compromised and institutional trust is eroded. The theory therefore provides both a normative standard against which non-teaching staff data-handling practices can be evaluated and a theoretical mechanism through which the relationship between staff handling practices and data confidentiality outcomes can be understood and explained.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study comprised 1,840 non-teaching staff drawn from the two state-owned universities in Rivers State, namely Rivers State University (RSU) and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE), encompassing registry officers, academic affairs staff, student affairs administrators, and data management personnel whose roles involved direct engagement with student records. Using the Taro Yamane formula at a margin of error of 0.05, a sample of 330 respondents was determined and proportionately allocated across the two institutions using stratified random sampling, ensuring equitable representation of both institutions and the diverse functional units within them.

Two researcher-designed instruments were used for data collection: Non-Teaching Staff Records Handling Questionnaire (NTSRHQ) and the Data Confidentiality Scale (DCS). The NTSRHQ was structured into three clusters: Cluster A assessed records management practices (8 items), Cluster B assessed data security practices (8 items), and Cluster C assessed confidentiality practices (8 items). The DCS measured respondents' overall perception of data confidentiality outcomes within their institution (10 items). Both instruments adopted a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Face and content validity were established through expert review by three specialists in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation at Rivers State University. The test-retest reliability method was adopted, with both instruments administered to 30 non-teaching staff outside the main sample at a two-week interval. Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficients of 0.83 for the NTSRHQ and 0.79 for the DCS were obtained, confirming high reliability for both instruments.

Out of 330 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 318 copies were successfully retrieved, representing a 96.4% retrieval rate, and these were used for the final data analysis. Research questions were answered using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC), with the strength of the relationship interpreted as follows: 0.00 to 0.29 = weak relationship; 0.30 to 0.59 = moderate relationship; 0.60 to 0.79 = strong relationship; 0.80 and above = very strong relationship. The null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using SPSS version 25. The decision rule was that if the p-value was less than or equal to 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected; if the p-value exceeded 0.05, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1

What is the relationship between records management by non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities?

Table 1: Relationship between Records Management and Data Confidentiality in Rivers State Owned Universities

	Data Confidentiality	Records Management	Remarks
Data Confidentiality	Pearson Correlation	1	.512
			Moderate Positive

	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	Relationship
	N	318	318	
Records Management	Pearson Correlation	.512	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	318	318	

Table 1 presents the Pearson correlation statistics on the relationship between records management by non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities. The correlation coefficient between records management and data confidentiality is .512, indicating a moderate positive relationship between the two variables. This means that as the quality of records management practices among non-teaching staff improves, the level of data confidentiality in the institution also increases in a moderate and positive direction. The answer to research question one is therefore that there is a moderate positive relationship between records management by non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities.

Research Question 2

What is the relationship between data security practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities?

Table 2: Relationship between Data Security Practices and Data Confidentiality in Rivers State Owned Universities

	Data Confidentiality	Data Security Practices	Remarks	
Data Confidentiality	Pearson Correlation	1	.574	Moderate Positive Relationship
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	
	N	318	318	
Data Security Practices	Pearson Correlation	.574	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	318	318	

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation statistics on the relationship between data security practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities. The correlation coefficient between data security practices and data confidentiality is .574, which is the strongest correlation recorded among the three predictor variables in this study. This indicates a moderate positive relationship, meaning that as the application of data security measures by non-teaching staff strengthens, data confidentiality outcomes in the institution improve correspondingly. The answer to research question two is that there is a moderate positive relationship between data security practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities.

Research Question 3

What is the relationship between confidentiality practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities?

Table 3: Relationship between Confidentiality Practices and Data Confidentiality in Rivers State Owned Universities

	Data Confidentiality	Confidentiality Practices	Remarks	
Data	Pearson	1	.548	Moderate

Confidentiality	Correlation			Positive
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	Relationship
	N	318	318	
Confidentiality Practices	Pearson	.548	1	
	Correlation			
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	318	318	

Table 3 presents the Pearson correlation statistics on the relationship between confidentiality practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities. The correlation coefficient of .548 indicates a moderate positive relationship between the two variables. This means that as the adherence of non-teaching staff to confidentiality norms and practices strengthens the overall level of data confidentiality in the institution increases in a moderate and positive direction. The answer to research question three is that there is a moderate positive relationship between confidentiality practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between records management by non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities.

Table 4: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the Relationship between Records Management and Data Confidentiality

Variable	N	df	r	r-cal	p-value	Decision
Records Management	318	316	.512	10.5	0.05	Rejected
Data Confidentiality	318					

Table 4 presents the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis examining the significant relationship between records management by non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities. The correlation coefficient (r) is .512, indicating a moderate positive relationship. The calculated r-value of 10.5 substantially exceeds the critical value at the 0.05 level of significance with 316 degrees of freedom, confirming that the relationship is statistically significant. Since the p-value is 0.05, the null hypothesis H_{01} is rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between records management by non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities, confirming that non-teaching staff who practise higher-quality records management are associated with stronger data confidentiality outcomes.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between data security practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities.

Table 5: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the Relationship between Data Security Practices and Data Confidentiality

Variable	N	df	r	r-cal	p-value	Decision
Data Security Practices	318	316	.574	12.3	0.05	Rejected
Data Confidentiality	318					

Table 5 presents the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis examining the significant relationship between data security practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities. The correlation coefficient of .574 indicates a moderate positive relationship, and is the highest r-value recorded in this study, suggesting that data security practices have the strongest individual association with data confidentiality outcomes among the three dimensions examined. The calculated r-value of 12.3 substantially exceeds the critical value at 0.05 level of significance with 316 degrees of

freedom, confirming statistical significance. The null hypothesis H_{02} is accordingly rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between data security practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities.

Hypothesis 3

There is no significant relationship between confidentiality practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities.

Table 6: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the Relationship Between Confidentiality Practices and Data Confidentiality

Variable	N	df	r	r-cal	p-value	Decision
Confidentiality Practices	318	316	.548	11.6	0.05	Rejected
Data Confidentiality	318					

Table 6 presents the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis examining the significant relationship between confidentiality practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities. The correlation coefficient of .548 indicates a moderate positive relationship. The calculated r-value of 11.6 exceeds the critical value at 0.05 level of significance with 316 degrees of freedom, confirming statistical significance. The null hypothesis H_{03} is accordingly rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between confidentiality practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities, confirming that staffs who consistently adhere to confidentiality norms contribute meaningfully to improved data confidentiality outcomes within their institutions.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first finding of this study revealed a moderate positive relationship between records management by non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of .512. This finding indicates that as the quality of records management practices improves, data confidentiality outcomes in the institution correspondingly strengthen in a meaningful and statistically significant direction. The rejection of null hypothesis H_{01} confirms that this relationship is not attributable to chance and that records management competency is a reliable predictor of data confidentiality outcomes among non-teaching staff in Rivers State universities.

This finding is consistent with the work of Okafor and Tamuno (2019), who found that the absence of formal records management training among registry staff in Rivers State universities was associated with elevated incidences of records misclassification and inadvertent confidentiality breaches, demonstrating that the technical and procedural dimensions of records management directly influence the confidentiality integrity of the records that non-teaching staff manage. The moderate strength of the correlation is theoretically coherent, because while sound records management creates the organisational conditions under which confidentiality can be maintained, it does not in itself guarantee that individual staff members will exercise the discretion and professional judgment necessary to avoid confidentiality violations. This is consistent with Information Accountability Theory (Weitzner et al., 2008), which posits that data governance requires both institutional accountability frameworks and the individual behavioural compliance of data handlers within those frameworks.

The finding further aligns with Ugwu and Ezema (2018), who established that the degree of congruence between formal records management policies and the actual daily practices of non-teaching staff was a stronger predictor of data confidentiality outcomes than the existence of policy frameworks alone. This suggests that universities in Rivers State must not only develop comprehensive records management policies but must invest meaningfully in translating those policies into consistent staff practice through targeted training, regular supervision, and effective performance accountability mechanisms.

The second finding of this study revealed a moderate positive relationship between data security practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of .574. This is the strongest correlation recorded among the three predictor variables in the study, indicating that data security practices have a comparatively more pronounced association with data confidentiality outcomes than either records management or confidentiality practices. The rejection of null hypothesis H_{02} confirms the statistical significance of this relationship, establishing that the application of robust data security measures by non-teaching staff is a reliable and meaningful predictor of institutional data confidentiality. This finding resonates with Nwachukwu and George (2022), who found that non-teaching staff in Rivers State universities who applied robust data security measures were significantly more effective at maintaining the confidentiality of student records. The fact that data security practices record the strongest correlation in this study is consistent with the theoretical propositions of Information Accountability Theory (Weitzner et al., 2008), which identifies the existence of auditable and enforceable data governance rules as the most direct mechanism through which data confidentiality is protected. Data security practices operationalise accountability in technical terms, creating the access controls, audit trails, and protective boundaries within which confidential student records can be maintained against both internal and external threats. The finding that data security practices have the strongest individual correlation with confidentiality outcomes therefore suggests that institutional investment in data security infrastructure and training represents the highest-return lever for improving data confidentiality in Rivers State universities.

The finding is further consistent with Okeke and Igbokwe (2021), who established that ICT literacy and data security competence among non-teaching staff were positively and significantly related to the security and confidentiality of student records in Nigerian universities, reinforcing the conclusion that the technical capacity of administrative staff is a primary determinant of institutional data confidentiality outcomes. The implication for university governance in Rivers State is that data security training for non-teaching staff must be treated not as a peripheral professional development activity but as a core institutional investment whose returns are directly realised in improved student data protection.

The third finding of this study revealed a moderate positive relationship between confidentiality practices of non-teaching staff and data confidentiality in Rivers State owned universities, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of .548. The rejection of null hypothesis H_{03} confirms the statistical significance of this relationship, establishing that the degree to which non-teaching staff adhere to confidentiality norms and professional obligations in their daily administrative conduct is a meaningful and reliable determinant of data confidentiality outcomes within the institution. This finding is consistent with the work of Eze and Nwosu (2021), who found that non-teaching staff who had received explicit training in confidentiality obligations and who operated within institutions where confidentiality norms were actively reinforced were significantly more likely to maintain appropriate boundaries in the handling and disclosure of student information. The moderate correlation recorded for confidentiality practices, while lower than that recorded for data security practices, is theoretically coherent, because confidentiality practices operate primarily at the level of individual professional conduct and interpersonal discretion rather than through technical systems that provide structural enforcement of protective boundaries. Individual confidentiality behaviour is therefore more susceptible to variation driven by personal values, situational pressures, and the quality of institutional socialisation in professional ethics.

The finding also resonates with Ihejirika and Briggs (2022), who found that professional ethics training was significantly associated with stronger confidentiality practice adherence among non-teaching staff, and with Wokoma and Amadi (2021), who identified the absence of formal reporting mechanisms as a structural barrier to confidentiality norm enforcement in Nigerian universities. These findings collectively suggest that improving

confidentiality practices among non-teaching staff in Rivers State universities requires a multi-pronged approach combining formal ethics training, clear institutional confidentiality policy frameworks, accessible reporting mechanisms, and supervisory accountability structures that reinforce confidentiality norms as non-negotiable professional standards.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the capacity of non-teaching staff to manage student records competently, apply effective data security measures, and adhere consistently to confidentiality obligations is a primary institutional determinant of data confidentiality in Rivers State universities, and that sustained investment in non-teaching staff training and institutional data governance frameworks is a necessary condition for meaningful improvement in student data protection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

University management in Rivers State should institutionalise regular and structured training programmes for non-teaching staff in records management, covering systematic classification, storage, retrieval, and disposal of student records in both physical and electronic formats, with competency assessments conducted annually to ensure sustained improvement in records management practice.

The management of RSU and IAUE should invest in robust data security infrastructure, including the deployment of role-based access control systems, secure electronic records management platforms, and regular staff training in cybersecurity awareness, to reduce the vulnerability of student records to unauthorised access, loss, and misuse.

University authorities in Rivers State should develop and enforce comprehensive confidentiality policy frameworks that clearly define the confidentiality obligations of non-teaching staff, establish accessible and protected reporting channels for confidentiality violations, and mandate formal professional ethics training as a component of staff induction and continuing professional development programmes.

The Rivers State Ministry of Education and the Governing Councils of RSU and IAUE should commission a comprehensive audit of existing records management systems, data security infrastructure, and confidentiality practices across all administrative units of both universities, with the audit findings used to guide targeted governance reform aimed at strengthening student data protection across the institutions.

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