

Behind Every Record: Exploring the Lived Experiences, Challenges, and Strategies of School Records Custodian in Times of Disaster

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the experiences, challenges, and strategies of School Records Custodians in managing and safeguarding school records before and after disasters in Batuan District. Employing a phenomenological research design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with fifteen (15) School Records Custodians selected through complete enumeration. The gathered narratives were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. Findings revealed four overarching areas: experiences of custodians, challenges encountered, strategies implemented, and measures for improving records management preparedness. The participants' experiences were reflected in the themes: Emotional Burden of Records Custodianship, Operational Challenges in School Records Management, and Realization of the Importance of Records Management in Disaster Preparedness. Challenges were manifested through themes: Organizational Constraints, Resource Limitations, and Communication and Coordination Gaps. Meanwhile, records protection strategies were characterized by Proactive Records Protection, Preparedness Planning, Coordinated Response, and Systematic Restoration and Digital Resilience. The study concluded that effective disaster-resilient records management requires an integrated system combining organizational preparedness, adequate resources, digital preservation, and coordinated stakeholder support. Based on the findings, the implementation of Project SHIELD (Securing Highly Important Educational Learning and Documentation Records) is recommended as a strategic intervention to institutionalize disaster preparedness, strengthen records protection practices, and ensure the accessibility and continuity of vital school records before, during, and after disasters.

Keywords: Disaster; Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; Records management; Records Custodian; School Records; School Records Management

1. Introduction

Recent calamities, disasters, and emergencies have continually affected the lives of Filipinos. In every crisis, ensuring the basic safety and security of individuals remains the top priority. According to UNICEF (2025), for the past four years, the Philippines has been ranked as the world's most disaster-prone country by the World Risk Index, with heatwaves, typhoons, widespread flooding and torrential rains becoming increasingly severe due to the climate crisis. Frequently faces both natural and human-induced emergencies that disrupt education caused repeated school closures and prolonged learning interruptions. These challenges jeopardize not only students' academic progress but also their overall well-being and long-term development (Lu, 2025).

1.1 School Records as Essential Educational Resources

School records serve as the foundation of effective educational management. They contain vital information about learners, personnel, school operations, finances, and institutional performance that supports informed decision-making, accountability, and the delivery of quality education. These records are indispensable in ensuring the continuity of school services, compliance with Department of Education (DepEd) policies, and the protection of the rights of learners, teachers, and other stakeholders. Proper records management therefore extends beyond administrative compliance; it is an essential component of effective school governance.

As custodians of institutional memory, schools are responsible for preserving both physical and electronic records throughout their life cycle. Maintaining accurate, complete, and accessible records enables schools to continue operations even during emergencies and supports efficient recovery after disruptive events.

1.2 Increasing Disaster Risks and Their Impact on Schools

The Philippines is among the most disaster-prone countries in the world because of its geographical location and exposure to numerous natural hazards. According to UNICEF (2025), the country has consistently ranked among those most vulnerable to disasters, with increasingly severe typhoons, flooding, heatwaves, and other climate-related events disrupting

communities and educational institutions. These disasters frequently result in prolonged school closures, interruptions in learning, and extensive damage to school infrastructure.

Beyond the destruction of buildings and instructional facilities, disasters also threaten the preservation of school records. When essential documents are damaged or lost, schools experience difficulties in restoring academic records, personnel files, financial documents, and administrative reports necessary for the continuity of educational services. Reports indicate that thousands of Philippine schools have sustained disaster-related damage in recent years, underscoring the vulnerability of educational institutions and emphasizing the need for comprehensive disaster preparedness strategies that include records protection.

1.3 The Critical Role of School Records Custodians During Disasters

The responsibility for safeguarding school records largely rests with school records custodians, who play a crucial role in organizing, maintaining, preserving, and retrieving official documents before, during, and after disasters. Their responsibilities extend beyond routine filing and storage to ensuring that vital records remain secure, accessible, and recoverable despite adverse circumstances.

Before disasters occur, records custodians are expected to implement preventive measures such as proper filing systems, secure storage, inventory management, and digital backups. During emergencies, they must protect essential records from damage while coordinating with school officials in disaster response efforts. Following disasters, they facilitate records recovery, restoration, and reconstruction to support the resumption of normal school operations.

Despite these responsibilities, many records custodians perform their duties under resource constraints, limited technological support, and inadequate disaster preparedness policies.

1.4 Challenges in School Records Management During Disasters

Effective records management becomes increasingly difficult during emergencies because many schools continue to rely heavily on paper-based records stored in facilities that are highly susceptible to water damage, fire, mold, and physical deterioration. Limited funding for disaster-resilient storage facilities, insufficient digitization initiatives, inadequate personnel training, and the absence of comprehensive disaster recovery plans further increase the vulnerability of school records.

These challenges are particularly evident in geographically isolated and disaster-prone communities where schools frequently experience severe weather disturbances. The loss or deterioration of official records may delay enrollment, graduation, employee transactions, financial reporting, and other essential school functions, thereby affecting both institutional operations and stakeholder services.

1.5 Strengthening Records Management Through Disaster Preparedness

To minimize disaster-related losses, educational institutions have increasingly recognized the importance of integrating disaster risk reduction principles into records management systems. Best practices include the digitization of records, cloud-based storage, routine backup procedures, fire- and waterproof storage facilities, regular records inventories, and comprehensive disaster recovery plans.

Institutional support through leadership, adequate funding, continuous professional development, and policy implementation also plays a significant role in strengthening the resilience of school records management systems. Such measures contribute to protecting institutional memory and ensuring uninterrupted educational services despite disasters.

1.6 Strengthening Records Management Through Disaster Preparedness

Although numerous studies have examined records management, disaster risk reduction, and school preparedness, existing literature primarily focuses on administrative systems, technological interventions, or institutional policies. Comparatively few qualitative investigations have explored the lived experiences of school records custodians who are directly responsible for protecting and recovering school records during disasters.

Moreover, limited evidence exists regarding how records custodians in public schools, particularly within Batuan District, navigate disaster situations, the challenges they encounter, and the strategies they employ to safeguard vital educational documents. Understanding these experiences is essential for developing context-specific recommendations that can strengthen disaster-resilient records management practices.

Guided by this gap, the present phenomenological study seeks to explore the lived experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of school records custodians in times of disaster. The findings are expected to contribute to the improvement of records management policies, disaster preparedness initiatives, and institutional support systems that promote the continuity and resilience of educational services.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of School Records Custodians in Batuan District. Phenomenology focuses on examining how individuals experience, perceive, and interpret a particular phenomenon in their everyday lives (Delmas & Giles, 2023). Through this approach, the study sought to explore the experiences, challenges, and strategies of School Records Custodians in ensuring the safekeeping and management of school records before and after disasters. The findings were derived from the participants' narratives and reflections, enabling the researchers to capture the essence of their experiences and provide a contextualized understanding of records management practices in disaster-affected educational settings.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at batuan District, Masbate Province. The municipality is situated on Ticao Island in the province of Masbate, Philippines. Based on the 2020 census, it is home to 14,610 residents distributed among 14 barangays. Covering an area of 56.28 square kilometers, Batuan is the smallest municipality in Masbate in terms of both land area and population. It holds valuable archaeological finds and plays an important ecological role, particularly in the conservation of species such as manta rays and the Visayan warty pig. Batuan District is composed of fifteen (15) schools, which include eleven (11) elementary schools, two (2) integrated schools, and two (2) secondary schools. The elementary schools are Matabao ES, Nasandig ES, Rizal ES, Panisihan ES, Batuan Central School, Burgos ES, Cañares ES, Danao ES, Mabuhay ES, and Royroy ES. The integrated schools in the district are Antonio Lee Llacer Sr. IS and Costa Rica IS. For secondary education, the district is served by Burgos National High School and Francisco Alindogan National High School (DepEd Masbate, 2025).

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The participants of this study involved fifteen (15) School Records Custodians from various public schools in Batuan District who were selected through complete enumeration. The participants occupied diverse positions, including Administrative Officer II, Administrative Assistant, Administrative Aide, Administrative Support Staff (ADAS), Registrar, and Teacher positions, reflecting the varied personnel assigned records management responsibilities within schools. Regarding educational attainment, all participants were college graduates, with several holding degrees in education, business administration, commerce, and other related fields. Their years of service ranged from 10 months to 28 years, demonstrating a mix of novice and highly experienced personnel. Similarly, their experience as records custodians ranged from less than one year to 15 years, providing diverse perspectives on records management practices. Additionally, fourteen (14) participants reported having attended records management-related training, while only one (1) participant had not received such training.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

This study employed complete enumeration, wherein all School Records Custodians in Batuan District who met the inclusion criteria were included as participants. Complete enumeration is a sampling approach in which all members of the identified population who meet the inclusion criteria are included in the study. This method is appropriate when the target population is relatively small, accessible, and possesses characteristics that are essential to the research objectives (Canonizado, 2024). This approach was appropriate because the target population was small and accessible which allows to gather comprehensive and representative data from all eligible participants. The use of complete enumeration ensured that the study captured the full range of experiences, challenges, and strategies of School Records Custodians in managing school records before and after disasters.

2.5 Research Instrument

This study employed a semi-structured interview method for data collection. Semi-structured interviews, commonly used in qualitative research, involve guiding questions anchored on predetermined themes while allowing flexibility in wording and sequence (George, 2022). This approach enabled School Records Custodians to freely share their experiences, insights, and challenges in managing and safeguarding school records, particularly before and after disasters, while maintaining consistency across all interviews through a thematic guide..

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

This study followed three (3) phases. In the first phase, the researcher presented the research proposal to the panel of evaluators for review, assessment, and feedback. Then, the researcher developed a semi-structured interview questionnaire and was submitted to the research adviser for feedback, validation, and approval. A letter of request to conduct the study was crafted and addressed to the Office of the Division Superintendent of the Schools Division of Masbate. Finally, participants were selected using complete enumeration, and pilot testing was administered to determine if any questions needed to be modified or replaced. In the second phase, the following were completed: the researcher communicated with the participants, either face-to-face and through an online platform, to inform them that they had been selected to participate

in the study and obtained their written informed consent. The participants were given instructions on the proper procedures for conducting and completing the interview within ten (10) minutes, including guidelines on how to respond to the questions and provide relevant information based on their experiences. The interview was then conducted, and any necessary clarifications or follow-up questions were addressed. It was anticipated that each participant and interview required approximately one to two hours to complete. Finally, in the third phase, the study carried out the following: the completed interview responses were collected and promptly encoded in Google Sheets; the confidentiality of all recorded information was ensured; and the data were analyzed using appropriate qualitative analysis procedures.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The data in this study will be analyzed using Thematic Analysis. Formally introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006), it provides a systematic and flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data. In this study, thematic analysis was utilized to examine the experiences, challenges, and practices of School Records Custodians in Batuan District in managing and safeguarding school records before and after disasters. This method is particularly appropriate as it allows for the systematic analysis of interview data gathered from custodians, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and themes that reflect their lived experiences and perspectives in records management.

To ensure methodological rigor, this study followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework for thematic analysis, which provided a systematic process for identifying, organizing, and interpreting meaningful insights from participants' responses.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

In relation to this study on school Records Custodians in Batuan district, RA 10173, also known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012 served as a primary basis for ensuring that all participants' information, interview responses, and institutional records were handled with strict confidentiality throughout the research process. In addition, CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 15, Series of 2019 reinforces ethical and quality standards in graduate research by promoting adherence to established policies on research design, data collection, analysis, and reporting. In this study, the CMO guided the researchers in observing proper ethical procedures in conducting interviews, obtaining informed consent, and ensuring the accuracy and reliability of data gathered from School Records Custodians. Together, RA 10173 and CHED CMO No. 15, s. 2019 strengthen the ethical foundation of this research by ensuring both the protection of participants' rights and the maintenance of academic standards

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Experiences of School Records Custodians in safekeeping school records before and after disasters.

The experiences of School Records Custodians in safeguarding school records before and after disasters encompass emotional challenges associated with fulfilling this critical responsibility. Their narratives reveal a range of emotional experiences encountered throughout the different phases of disaster preparedness, response, and recovery, highlighting how these emotions influenced their actions, decision-making, and commitment to protecting essential school records.

3.1.1 Importance of School Records in Educational Institutions

The participants, who were School Records Custodians, described a wide range of emotions during the process of recovering, restoring, and replacing damaged records before and after a disaster. The most common responses reflected worry, stress, pressure, and concern over the possible loss of important school documents and the challenges involved in restoring them. Several participants expressed anxiety about the condition of records and the uncertainty of whether they could be successfully recovered. Participant 1 shared, I felt worried and stressed about the loss and recovery of important records after the disaster. The restoration process was challenging and time-consuming, but I felt relieved and more confident as records were recovered and better protection measures were put in place. Similarly, Participant 5 stated, I felt stressed and concerned during the process of recovering, restoring, and replacing damaged records because many of the documents were important and difficult to recreate. The situation was overwhelming at first, especially when we were unsure of the extent of the damage and whether all records could be recovered. However, as we worked on restoring and organizing the records, I felt more hopeful and determined to complete the task. The experience also made me realize the importance of disaster preparedness, proper storage, and maintaining digital backups. Participant 8 likewise noted, I felt worried before the recovery process because important records might have been lost or damaged. After the records were restored and secured, I felt relieved and more confident. These responses indicate that emotional distress was a common experience among records custodians during disaster recovery. In contrast, several participants reported experiencing relief, confidence, hope, satisfaction, and reassurance once the recovery process was completed and records were successfully restored. Participant 11 stated, As the recovery progressed, I started to feel hopeful and encouraged because many records were successfully restored. Participant 13 shared, Before the disaster, I felt concerned about the possibility of losing important school records. During the recovery process, I experienced challenges and pressure in restoring and organizing damaged documents. However, after successfully recovering and securing the records, I felt relieved and more confident

in the school's preparedness and records management practices. Similarly, Participant 14 noted, The situation was initially stressful because school records are essential for administrative and educational operations. Recovering and restoring damaged records required considerable time and effort. After the recovery process, I felt satisfied that the necessary records were preserved and that measures were implemented to prevent similar issues in the future. Participant 15 also explained, I felt worried about the condition and possible loss of important records immediately after the disaster. The process of recovering, restoring, and replacing damaged documents was challenging but manageable through teamwork and proper coordination. After the records were restored and secured, I felt reassured and motivated to strengthen disaster preparedness and records protection measures within the school. These findings indicate that successful recovery efforts helped alleviate negative emotions and fostered a greater sense of preparedness. This finding imply that safeguarding school records during disasters extends beyond a technical or administrative responsibility and has a significant emotional and psychological impact on School Records Custodians. This supports the assertion of Stephens (2018), who emphasized that the loss and recovery of essential records often require substantial time, effort, and resources, creating significant challenges for records custodians and highlighting the importance of disaster preparedness and records protection measures.

3.1.2 Operational Challenges in School Records Management

This theme emerged because the participants' physical experiences consistently reflected disruptions in the day-to-day processes involved in safeguarding, accessing, organizing, storing, and retrieving school records following disasters. School records custodians described how disasters affected their ability to access, organize, retrieve, and secure school records. The most frequently reported experiences centered on disruptions in access to records, damaged storage facilities, difficulties in organizing documents, and delays in retrieval processes. Many participants explained that disasters limited their ability to access both physical and digital records due to damaged facilities, unsafe storage areas, power interruptions, and connectivity problems. Participant 1 stated, The disaster disrupted access to both physical and digital school records due to facility damage, power interruptions, and conndamaged storage areas and system disruptions, increasing the risk of loss or damage. Similarly, Participant 5 shared, The disaster greatly affected my ability to access, organize, and secure school records. Some records were damaged by floodwater and moisture, making them difficult to retrieve and use. The filing cabinets and storage areas were also affected, causing documents to become disorganized. During the recovery period, it was challenging to locate important records because some had to be dried, sorted, and restored. Ensuring the security of records was also difficult since damaged storage facilities increased the risk of loss or unauthorized access. Participant 13 likewise noted, The disaster temporarily disrupted access to school records due to damaged facilities and restricted entry to affected areas. Some documents were exposed to water and moisture, requiring immediate transfer to a secure location. These responses demonstrate how disasters can interrupt records management operations and increase the vulnerability of important school documents. Some participants emphasized the temporary closure of facilities and restricted access to storage areas, which affected the retrieval and management of records. Participant 11 stated, With my two years of service, I experienced that the disaster significantly affected access to school records due to temporary closure and limited safety of storage areas. Similarly, Participant 12 noted, As a record custodian with 1 year of service, the disaster affected my ability to access school records because some storage areas were temporarily unsafe and inaccessible. These findings suggest that safety concerns and facility damage often limit access to records immediately following disaster events.

This result implies that physical challenges experienced by participants demonstrate that disruptions in storage facilities, access to records, and digital infrastructure can compromise the preservation and availability of vital school documents. These findings are consistent with the study of Akussah (2018), which found that disasters can severely disrupt records management operations by limiting access to records, damaging storage facilities, and compromising the security and preservation of vital documents. The findings further support the view that disaster preparedness, secure storage systems, and digital backup strategies are essential for ensuring the continuity, accessibility, and protection of organizational records during emergencies.

3.1.3 Realization of the Importance of Records Management in Disaster Preparedness

The intellectual experiences of School Records Custodians in safeguarding school records before and after disasters reflect the cognitive processes involved in assessing risks, making decisions, solving problems, and adapting records management practices during emergency situations. The participants shared that their experiences before and after the disaster significantly influenced their understanding of effective records management. The most frequently expressed realization was that records management extends beyond routine administrative work and serves as a critical component of disaster preparedness, continuity of operations, and information protection. Several participants explained that the disaster transformed their perception of records management from a regular office responsibility into a strategic function essential for safeguarding school operations. Participant 1 stated, My experiences before and after the disaster greatly influenced my understanding of effective records management. Before the disaster, I viewed records management mainly as a routine administrative task. However, the challenges encountered during and after the disaster made me realize that proper records management is essential for ensuring the continuity of school operations and protecting important information. The experience highlighted the importance of organized filing systems, regular backups, secure storage, and disaster

preparedness plans. It also showed that accessible and well-protected records can significantly reduce recovery time and prevent the loss of critical information. Similarly, Participant 5 shared, My experiences before and after the disaster significantly changed my understanding of effective records management. Before the disaster, I believed that keeping records organized in filing cabinets was sufficient. However, after experiencing the loss and damage of important documents, I realized that effective records management involves not only organization but also protection, backup, and disaster preparedness. The experience taught me the importance of maintaining digital copies, regularly updating records, using secure storage facilities, and having a disaster recovery plan. As a result, I became more proactive in ensuring that records are properly managed and safeguarded to minimize risks during future emergencies. These responses indicate that firsthand disaster experiences deepened participants' appreciation of records management as an essential element of institutional resilience and operational continuity.

Participants also recognized the importance of organized filing systems, secure storage, and records accessibility in reducing risks and facilitating recovery. Participant 13 stated, My experiences before and after the disaster highlighted the importance of proper records management in ensuring the availability, accessibility, and security of important school documents. The situation emphasized the need for organized filing systems, regular records inventory, and appropriate storage measures to minimize risks and facilitate recovery during emergencies. Similarly, Participant 14 shared, The disaster increased my understanding of the critical role of records management in maintaining school operations. It demonstrated the value of safeguarding vital records through proper organization, secure storage, and backup systems. These experiences reinforced the need for preparedness and continuous improvement in records management practices. Participant 15 likewise explained, Before the disaster, records management was primarily viewed as an administrative responsibility. However, after experiencing the challenges of recovering and restoring records, I gained a deeper appreciation of its role in disaster preparedness and continuity of operations. The experience underscored the importance of maintaining accurate, well-organized, and protected records to ensure efficient service delivery and institutional resilience. These findings suggest that participants became more aware of the relationship between effective records management and the continuity of school services during and after disasters. This realization supports the conceptual review of Zulkipili (2021), which emphasized that disaster preparedness is an essential component of records management because it protects vital records, ensures their accessibility, and enables organizations to maintain operational continuity and recover efficiently following disaster events.

3.2 Challenges that School Records Custodians encountered in ensuring effective records management before and after disaster.

3.2.1 Organizational Constraints in Records Management

The organizational challenges encountered by School Records Custodians in ensuring effective records management before and after disasters reflect the institutional, administrative, and resource-related barriers that affect the protection and management of school records. The responses revealed that difficulties were already present prior to the disaster but became more severe and complex afterward, particularly in terms of storage limitations, filing systems, workload demands, and record retrieval. Before the disaster, the most frequently reported challenges included limited storage space, large volume of records, fragmented filing systems, and difficulties in maintaining updated classification systems. Participants explained that even under normal conditions, managing records required significant effort due to workload and resource constraints. Participant 1 stated, Before the disaster, some organizational challenges included maintaining an up-to-date filing system, ensuring consistent record classification, managing limited storage space, and keeping both physical and digital records properly organized. In some cases, records were stored in different locations, making retrieval time-consuming and increasing the risk of misplacement. Similarly, Participant 5 shared, Before the disaster, one of the main organizational challenges was managing a large volume of school records with limited storage space and filing equipment. Keeping records updated, properly classified, and easily retrievable was sometimes difficult due to workload and resource constraints. Participant 13 likewise noted, Before the disaster, the primary organizational challenges included limited storage space, maintaining an updated filing system, and ensuring the proper classification of records. These responses indicate that inefficiencies in storage and filing systems were already existing concerns prior to the disaster. Some participants also highlighted physical damage and system disruptions affecting both paper-based and digital records. Participant 7 explained, Before the disaster: Limited storage space After the disaster: Records were damaged by water and wind resulting to difficulty of retrieving. Participant 6 also noted, Power outages and system failures can prevent access to digital records. These findings show that disasters affect not only physical records but also electronic systems, further complicating retrieval and continuity of records management. The findings imply that effective school records management depends not only on the commitment and competence of School Records Custodians but also on the strength of the organizational systems that support their work. This supports the observation of Franks (2018), who emphasized that effective records management requires not only proper organization and classification but also robust disaster preparedness and recovery mechanisms to maintain the continuity and accessibility of records during and after disruptive events.

3.2.2 Resource Limitations in Records Management

The responses revealed that limitations in funding, storage facilities, equipment, technology, and personnel were already present before the disaster and became more severe and urgent during the recovery period as part of resource-related challenges encountered by school records custodian Participants explained that these constraints affected the overall ability of schools to properly secure records. Participant 1 stated, Before the disaster, resource-related challenges included limited funding for secure storage facilities, inadequate record management equipment, insufficient backup systems, and a lack of specialized materials to protect important documents. Staff training and dedicated personnel for records management were also limited, making it difficult to implement comprehensive safeguarding measures. Similarly, Participant 5 shared, Before the disaster, we faced resource-related challenges such as limited storage space, inadequate filing cabinets, and insufficient funding for records management supplies and equipment. There were also challenges in maintaining updated technology for storing and backing up records. Participant 7 likewise emphasized, Before the disaster, the school faced resource-related challenges such as limited filing cabinets, insufficient storage facilities, inadequate record protection materials, and a lack of digital equipment for scanning and backing up important documents. Budget constraints also affected the school's ability to invest in improved records management systems. These responses indicate that inadequate infrastructure and limited financial resources were already key barriers to effective records safeguarding. Another significant post-disaster challenge involved limited manpower, time constraints, and competing school responsibilities, which affected the ability to fully safeguard and restore records. Participant 9 stated, Time constraints and competing school responsibilities limited the resources available for records management, disaster preparedness, and recovery efforts. Participant 14 also noted, Following the disaster, the need for protective materials, temporary storage areas, and additional personnel support became more evident as the school worked to safeguard and restore important records. These findings show that human resource limitations further compounded material shortages during recovery operations. The findings imply that the effectiveness of school records management before and after disasters is highly dependent on the availability of adequate financial, physical, technological, and human resources. The persistent shortages in storage facilities, filing equipment, digital backup systems, protective materials, funding, and personnel demonstrate that resource limitations reduce the capacity of schools to protect vital records even under normal conditions and become more critical during disaster recovery. Zulkipli (2021) argued that disaster preparedness in records management requires organizations to allocate sufficient resources for preventive measures, digital backup systems, secure storage facilities, and recovery mechanisms to safeguard vital records and sustain organizational operations during disruptive events.

3.2.3 Communication and Coordination Gaps in Records Management

Communication challenges encountered with school administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders in relation to records management before and after the disaster were identified. The responses revealed that communication issues were already present prior to the disaster but became more complicated and critical during and after the emergency situation, particularly in terms of coordination, information sharing, and recovery efforts. Before the disaster, the most frequently reported communication challenges included inconsistent dissemination of records management policies, delays in document submission, limited coordination among stakeholders, and lack of awareness regarding records handling responsibilities. Participants explained that records management procedures were not always clearly communicated or consistently followed across the school. Participant 1 stated, Before the disaster, communication challenges included inconsistent sharing of information about records management procedures, limited coordination among school administrators, teachers, and staff, and varying levels of awareness regarding record-keeping responsibilities. Important updates about record storage, retention, and protection were sometimes not communicated effectively, which could lead to confusion or inconsistencies in record management practices. Similarly, Participant 5 shared, Before the disaster, communication challenges included delays in receiving necessary documents, inconsistent reporting practices, and limited coordination among school administrators, teachers, and other personnel regarding records management procedures. Participant 7 likewise noted, Before the disaster, communication regarding records management was generally manageable, but challenges included delays in submitting required documents, inconsistent dissemination of information, and occasional misunderstandings about records management procedures among teachers and staff. These responses indicate that pre-disaster communication gaps contributed to inconsistencies in records management practices. Some participants also emphasized challenges related to role transition, experience level, and coordination difficulties among newly assigned personnel. Participant 10 stated, As a new record custodian, I experienced difficulty in communicating effectively with stakeholders because I was still learning the school's records management structure and key personnel. Participant 11 similarly noted, As a record custodian with two years of service, I experienced delays in communication with some stakeholders, especially during and immediately after the disaster. These responses suggest that experience level also influenced communication efficiency during disaster response.

The findings imply that effective records management during disasters depends not only on established policies and available resources but also on clear, timely, and well-coordinated communication among school administrators, teachers, School Records Custodians, and other stakeholders. These findings align with Adomi (2019), who emphasized that effective records management in institutions relies heavily on clear communication channels, coordinated information flow, and reliable communication systems, particularly during emergencies when disruptions can significantly hinder organizational response and recovery efforts.

3.3 Strategies that School Records Custodians implemented before and after disaster to secure school records

3.3.1 Proactive Records Protection through Systematic Management and Disaster Preparedness

There are several strategies implemented to reduce the risk of damage or loss of school records before a disaster occurred. The responses revealed that preventive measures primarily focused on systematic filing, secure storage, proper labeling, and basic digitization, which were commonly practiced across schools to enhance records protection and accessibility.

The most frequently reported strategies involved systematic organization of records, proper filing and classification, labeling, and secure storage practices, which were consistently emphasized by participants. Participant 1 stated, To reduce the risk of damage or loss of school records before a disaster occurred, we implemented several preventive measures. These included organizing and properly classifying records, storing important documents in secure and protected locations, and maintaining regular backups of digital records. We also used cabinets, waterproof containers, or designated storage areas to protect physical records from environmental hazards. Regular monitoring and updating of records were conducted to ensure accuracy and accessibility. Similarly, Participant 5 shared, Before the disaster, I implemented several strategies to reduce the risk of damage or loss of school records. These included organizing and properly classifying records, storing important documents in secure filing cabinets, and conducting regular inventories to ensure records were complete and up to date. Participant 13 likewise noted, Prior to the disaster, I implemented systematic filing and classification procedures to ensure that records were properly organized and easily retrievable. Important documents were stored in secure cabinets and designated storage areas, while regular inventory and monitoring were conducted to reduce the risk of loss or damage. These responses indicate that structured filing systems and proper classification were the foundational strategies used in records protection. The findings suggest that systematic records management practices, including proper filing, classification, secure storage, regular inventory, and policy compliance, are essential in protecting school records from disaster-related damage and ensuring their accessibility, integrity, and continuity. They further imply that school administrators should strengthen institutional records management through standardized policies, regular staff training, and coordinated disaster preparedness initiatives. These findings are supported by International Organization for Standardization's ISO 15489-1:2016, which emphasizes that systematic records management preserves the authenticity, reliability, integrity, and usability of records while supporting organizational continuity during disruptions.

3.3.2 Enhancing Records Resilience through Preparedness Planning

The participants, who were School Records Custodians, described various ways in which school records were prepared for possible disasters. The responses revealed that preparation strategies were mainly centered on systematic organization, secure storage, labeling, digital backup, and disaster preparedness planning, all of which were aimed at ensuring the protection, accessibility, and continuity of important school records. The most frequently reported preparation strategies involved systematic filing, proper classification, labeling, and secure physical storage of records, which were consistently emphasized by participants. Participant 1 stated, We prepared school records for possible disasters by organizing and classifying documents systematically to ensure easy access and retrieval. Important records were stored in secure locations, such as locked filing cabinets and designated storage areas, to protect them from damage. Similarly, Participant 5 shared, I prepared school records for possible disasters by organizing and classifying documents according to their importance and frequency of use. Critical records were stored in secure filing cabinets and, when possible, in areas less exposed to flooding, moisture, or other hazards. Participant 13 likewise noted, School records were prepared for possible disasters through proper classification, labeling, and filing of documents. Vital records were identified and stored in secure locations, while regular inventory and monitoring were conducted to ensure their accessibility and protection during emergencies. These responses indicate that structured organization and proper classification were the foundation of disaster preparedness in records management.

Another significant theme involved institutional preparedness, policy integration, and coordination among school personnel, which strengthened the overall records management system. Participant 1 explained, We also maintained updated inventories of important records, implemented records retention procedures, and trained staff on proper record-handling and emergency response practices. In addition, disaster preparedness plans were developed to outline procedures for protecting, recovering, and restoring records in the event of an emergency. Participant 9 added, Records protection and recovery procedures were incorporated into the School DRRM Plan, ensuring that staff were aware of the steps to take before, during, and after a disaster. Participant 15 likewise stated, Disaster preparedness measures included identifying and prioritizing vital records, maintaining accurate records inventories, and implementing proper storage and preservation practices. The school also strengthened records management procedures and coordinated with personnel to ensure that important documents could be easily secured, retrieved, and restored in the event of a disaster. These findings suggest that preparedness is strengthened when records management is integrated into formal disaster risk reduction systems.

The findings indicate that enhancing records resilience requires systematic records management, institutional preparedness, and coordinated disaster planning to ensure the protection and continuity of vital school records. These results imply that schools should integrate records management into their Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) programs

through standardized procedures, staff training, and coordinated response mechanisms. This is consistent with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction's Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 which emphasizes that institutional preparedness, coordinated planning, and capacity building are essential for strengthening resilience and maintaining the continuity of critical functions before, during, and after disasters.

3.3.3 Coordinated Response for Records Protection and Recovery

The responses revealed that the most urgent priorities focused on securing, relocating, assessing, and separating records based on their condition, as well as ensuring the continuity of both physical and digital records through coordinated recovery efforts. The most frequently reported immediate actions involved relocating records to safer areas, securing vital documents, and separating damaged from undamaged files to prevent further deterioration. Participant 1 stated, During and immediately after the disaster, our priority was to secure and assess the condition of school records. We relocated important documents to safe and dry areas to prevent further damage from water, debris, or environmental exposure. Damaged records were identified, separated, and carefully handled to minimize deterioration. Similarly, Participant 5 shared, During and immediately after the disaster, my priority was to secure and assess the condition of the school records. I first checked the storage areas to identify records that were at risk of further damage and moved them to a safe and dry location whenever possible. Damaged documents were separated from undamaged ones to prevent further deterioration. Participant 7 likewise noted, I secured vital records, transferred them to a safe location, and checked for any damaged or missing documents for immediate recovery. These responses indicate that rapid relocation and segregation of records were the primary response actions to minimize loss and damage. Another significant theme involved protecting and verifying digital records and backup systems, ensuring that electronic information remained accessible despite disruptions. Participant 1 stated, We also checked the status of digital records, secured storage devices and computer equipment, and verified the availability of backup files. Participant 6 added, Securing all files in a safety areas and scanned some important files. Participant 11 and Participant 12 both noted, I checked available digital files and backups to ensure important information remained accessible. These responses indicate that safeguarding digital records was a critical parallel action alongside physical record protection.

These findings imply that schools should establish clear emergency response procedures, strengthen coordination among personnel, and regularly maintain digital backup systems to ensure that essential records remain protected and accessible during disaster situations. It is also supported by International Organization for Standardization's ISO 15489-1:2016, which highlights that protecting and maintaining accessible records during disruptions is essential for organizational continuity and effective recovery.

3.3.4 Strengthening Records Recovery through Systematic Restoration and Digital Resilience

The participants, who were School Records Custodians, identified several recovery strategies that were considered most effective in restoring and preserving school records after a disaster. The responses consistently highlighted that effective recovery depended on a combination of digital backup systems, systematic assessment of records, proper restoration procedures, prioritization of vital records, and coordinated efforts among school personnel. The most frequently reported effective strategies involved the use of digital backups, systematic record assessment, and proper documentation and restoration procedures, which were emphasized across many responses. Participant 1 stated, The most effective recovery strategies in restoring and preserving school records were the use of backup copies, systematic record assessment, proper document restoration techniques, and coordinated recovery efforts among school personnel. Similarly, Participant 5 shared, The most effective recovery strategies in restoring and preserving school records were the use of backup copies, systematic record assessment, and proper restoration procedures. Digital backups allowed us to recover important information quickly when some physical records were damaged or lost. Participant 6 also emphasized, The most effective strategies in restoring and preserving school records were the immediate retrieval and use of digital backups. These strategies were effective because they combined quick response, proper organized and the use of technology, which significantly reduced data loss and supported faster recovery of school records. These responses indicate that digital backup systems and structured recovery procedures were central to effective records restoration. Several participants emphasized the importance of prioritization of vital records, inventory management, and systematic reorganization of documents, which helped streamline recovery efforts. Participant 9 stated, Prioritizing vital records, such as learner records and personnel files, allowed the school to resume essential operations more quickly. Participant 13 explained, The most effective recovery strategies were the immediate relocation of records to secure storage areas, systematic inventory of affected documents, and proper reorganization of files. These measures helped prevent further damage, facilitated document retrieval, and ensured the preservation of vital school records. Participant 14 similarly noted, Conducting a thorough records assessment, separating damaged and undamaged documents, and prioritizing the recovery of vital records were among the most effective strategies. These responses highlight that structured prioritization and assessment are essential for efficient recovery operations. Another significant theme involved coordination among school personnel and the use of proper restoration techniques, which supported accuracy and continuity during recovery. Participant 15 stated, Maintaining backup copies of important records, implementing proper document restoration procedures, and strengthening coordination among school personnel proved to be the most effective recovery strategies. These approaches minimized the risk of permanent data loss, improved records accessibility, and supported the continuity

of school operations following the disaster. Participant 5 also emphasized collaboration, noting that Collaboration with school administrators and staff was also essential in verifying information and reconstructing missing records. These findings align with ISO 15489-1:2016, which emphasizes that effective records management during emergencies and disasters requires the implementation of systematic controls, proper classification, secure storage, and reliable backup systems to ensure the authenticity, integrity, accessibility, and continuity of records. The standard further highlights the importance of prompt protective actions, secure relocation of records, preservation of both physical and electronic documents, and coordinated recovery processes to minimize losses and maintain organizational operations management practices that support the long-term preservation, protection, and recovery of vital records in times of risk and disruption during and after disruptive events. These principles underscore the need for structured records.

3.4 Measures to Enhance School Records Management Preparedness in Responding to Disasters Strengthening Disaster-Resilient Records Management through Project SHIELD Implementation

There are several strategies implemented to reduce the risk of damage or loss of school records before a disaster occurred. The participants, who were School Records Custodians, identified several improvements that should be made to existing records management policies and procedures to strengthen disaster preparedness. The responses consistently emphasized the need to enhance disaster recovery planning, digitization, secure storage systems, staff training, risk assessment, and the integration of disaster risk reduction measures in school records management. The most frequently reported improvement involved the development and strengthening of formal disaster preparedness and recovery policies for records management, including clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and procedures during emergencies. Participant 1 stated, schools should implement a formal disaster recovery plan specifically for records management, outlining roles, responsibilities, and step-by-step procedures during emergencies. Regular training and drills for staff should be conducted to ensure preparedness and awareness of proper record-handling practices. Similarly, Participant 5 shared, To better prepare for disasters, existing records management policies and procedures should be strengthened by incorporating comprehensive disaster preparedness and recovery plans. Schools should establish clear guidelines for the protection, backup, storage, and recovery of both physical and digital records. Participant 13 likewise noted, Existing records management policies should be strengthened by incorporating comprehensive disaster preparedness and recovery procedures. This includes establishing clear guidelines for the protection, backup, storage, and restoration of vital records, as well as conducting regular records inventories and risk assessments. These responses indicate that structured disaster planning is considered essential for effective records management resilience. Another significant theme involved capacity building, training, audits, and regular monitoring of records systems, which were viewed as necessary for sustaining effective implementation of policies. Participant 1 emphasized, Regular training and drills for staff should be conducted to ensure preparedness and awareness of proper record-handling practices. Participant 11 shared, Routine audits and inventory checks should be required to ensure records are updated, complete, and properly secured. Participant 15 likewise stated, To better prepare for disasters, policies should emphasize the identification and protection of vital records, the use of secure and disaster-resistant storage facilities, and the regular updating of records management procedures. Additionally, periodic monitoring, emergency preparedness drills, and the integration of technology for records backup and preservation should be strengthened. These responses highlight the importance of continuous evaluation and staff preparedness in strengthening policy implementation. The findings imply that strengthening school records management preparedness requires a comprehensive and institutionalized approach that integrates policy enhancement, digitization, secure storage systems, and continuous capacity building. These improvements highlight the need for a structured framework that goes beyond isolated practices and instead promotes a coordinated, sustainable, and disaster-resilient records management system. In relation to Project SHIELD, the results suggest that its implementation can serve as a strategic framework for schools by strengthening systematic disaster preparedness and recovery planning, enhancing human capacity through training and drills, improving infrastructure resilience for record storage, and promoting digital transformation for records continuity. Through this integrated approach, schools can ensure the protection, accessibility, and long-term preservation of vital records before, during, and after disasters. This implication is supported by the principles of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 developed by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, which emphasizes the importance of strengthening disaster risk governance, investing in disaster resilience, enhancing preparedness for effective response, and “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. These principles align with Project SHIELD’s focus on systematic preparedness, institutional coordination, and capacity building as key drivers of resilience in school records management systems.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn: 1. Comprehensive and resilient records management systems ensures the protection, accessibility, and continuity of school records before, during, and after disasters. Effective records management is not only an administrative task but a critical component of disaster preparedness, institutional continuity, and organizational resilience in schools. 2. School Records Custodians encountered significant organizational, resource-related, and communication challenges in managing school records, which became more severe during and after disasters. These challenges highlight weaknesses in storage systems, limited resources, and disrupted coordination that hinder effective records management and recovery efforts. Critical need for

strengthened disaster preparedness, improved infrastructure and resources, and more effective communication systems to ensure resilient and continuous school records management. 3. School Records Custodians implemented a comprehensive set of strategies before, during, and after disasters, covering mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery phases to safeguard school records. These strategies combined systematic filing, secure storage, labeling, and digital backups with rapid response actions such as relocation and assessment of records, as well as coordinated recovery efforts focused on restoration and prioritization of vital documents. Integrated approach combining traditional practices, digital solutions, and coordinated action is essential for ensuring the protection, continuity, and recovery of school records during disasters. 4. Implementation of Project SHIELD (Securing Highly Important Educational Learning and Documentation Records) as a strategic school-based intervention to institutionalize these measures through the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and Annual Implementation Plan (AIP). By implementing Project SHIELD, schools in Batuan District can transition from a reactive approach to a proactive and disaster resilient records management system that ensures the protection, accessibility, and continuity of vital school records before, during, and after emergencies.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed: 1. DepEd Masbate Province may issue a Division Memorandum, aligned with existing DepEd policies, institutionalizing regular capacity-building activities, disaster simulation drills, and collaborative records management initiatives to strengthen the competencies of School Records Custodians and ensure resilient records protection, response, and recovery through Project SHIELD. 2. School Heads may prioritize the allocation of MOOE funds through the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and Annual Implementation Plan (AIP) to support Project SHIELD, including the procurement of disaster-resistant storage facilities and digital backup systems to strengthen the protection, accessibility, and continuity of school records during emergencies. 3. School Heads should strengthen disaster preparedness through Project SHIELD by enhancing communication systems and coordination protocols, including regular coordination meetings, emergency communication channels, and dedicated online platforms to ensure timely information sharing and effective collaboration during disasters. 4. School Heads may strengthen partnerships with Local Government Units (LGUs), private organizations, non-government organizations (NGOs), and other stakeholders through Project SHIELD to mobilize resources, enhance records management, and support disaster preparedness initiatives, including the provision of storage facilities, digitization resources, equipment, and capacity-building programs. 5. Future researchers may utilize the findings of this study as a reference for further investigations related to the roles, challenges, and practices of school records custodians. The results may serve as a basis for conducting more in-depth studies on records management systems, disaster preparedness in schools, and the development of improved policies and interventions.

This study focused on the lived experiences, challenges, and strategies of School Records Custodians in managing school records before and after disasters. It covered the fifteen (15) public elementary and secondary schools within the Batuan District during the School Year 2025–2026. The study investigated how School Records Custodians safeguarded, organized, maintained, and recovered essential school records during disaster situations. It further explored their emotional, organizational, and operational experiences, the challenges they encountered, and the strategies they employed to ensure the continuity, protection, and accessibility of records. Data were gathered through semi structured face-to-face interviews and were analyzed using a six-step thematic analysis approach to identify significant patterns, themes, and insights from the participants' experiences. The study was delimited to public elementary and secondary schools within the Batuan District only and excluded private schools and institutions outside the district. The participants were limited to School Records Custodians; thus, the perspectives of school heads, teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders were not included. Moreover, the study focused only on school records management in relation to disaster preparedness, response, and recovery and did not cover other aspects of disaster risk reduction or broader school emergency response systems. These delimitations were established to maintain the study's focus and alignment with its objective of understanding the experiences, challenges, and strategies of School Records Custodians during disaster situations.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study followed ethical standards in educational research to protect the rights and welfare of the participants. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Department of Education Division Office and the Public Schools District Supervisor of Batuan District. Informed consent was secured from all participants after explaining the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and their right to participate voluntarily or withdraw at any time without consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly observed. Participants' identities were protected through the use of codes, and no personal information was disclosed in the data analysis or report. Academic records were accessed only with proper authorization and handled in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173). All data collected were used solely for research purposes and stored securely. The study ensured that participants were not exposed to physical, psychological, or emotional harm. Survey questions were non-intrusive, and data collection was conducted during students' free time to avoid disruption and coercion. Ethical principles of fairness, objectivity, and academic integrity were upheld throughout the research process.

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