

Archives and Records Management Education and Training in Africa – Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

The education and training of archives and records professionals in Africa can be traced back several decades. Archives and records practitioners in Africa's different countries have, over the years, taken varying paths to attain their professional qualifications. A number of publications have offered an analysis of the historical developments. This paper outlines progress on an ongoing international study by InterPARES Trust Africa Team that examines the curricula in different African educational institutions and investigates the extent to which they address the increasingly complex environment that includes the management of digital records in networked environments. It is hoped that the study will inform curriculum development and review in the area of digital records at the institutions of higher learning in Africa.

Keywords: Africa, Archives, Curriculum Development, Digital Records, Education, Records Management,

1. Introduction

Several commentators note that South Africa is the most advanced African country in the implementation of software applications to manage digital records (S. M. Keakopa, 2010; Kemoni, 2009). A survey of South African institutions aimed at investigating their experiences in implementing Enterprise Content Management (ECM) applications revealed that more than 40% of the institutions had five or more years of practical experience in ECM implementation (Katu, 2012, pp. 48-49). However, an assessment of the maturity level in ECM implementation suggests that there is room for improvement (Katu, 2015a). The situation of digital records deemed archival also raises concern since studies show that the national archival system is plagued by poor infrastructure and the lack of skilled capacity to ingest any digital records for permanent preservation (Ngoepe & Keakopa, 2011; The Archival Platform, 2015, p. 102). The lack of skilled capacity is particularly concerning because this would be the catalyst for reversing the trend. Ngoepe et al. (2014, p. 120) observed that out of the two dozen universities in South Africa, only 10 offered programmes

in library and information science and only three offered any qualifications in archives and records management and there are questions about well their curricula address the management of digital records.

2. Addressing the challenge of lack of capacity

Africa's archives and records professionals are expected to be adept at managing digital records. Studies conducted since the early 2000s have shown that there are gaps in addressing this lack of capacity (Department of Arts and Culture [South Africa], 2010; Mutiti, 2002; Wamukoya & Mutula, 2005; Wato, 2006). A key component in addressing this capacity deficit would be through the education and training programmes in place throughout the African continent. There was been a tendency in the past to address the education and training challenges of the continent through regional initiatives such as the two centres established in Ghana and Senegal in the early 1970s. However, due to financial and logistical reasons these initiatives didn't last more than a decade, giving way to national programmes which continue to provide support for current professionals (Katu, 2015b).

A more contemporary example is the development of freely available educational material such as those by the International Records Management Trust funded by the World Bank and other donor institutions focusing on several aspects related to the management of digital records:

- Route maps for moving from a paper-based to an electronic information environment (International Records Management Trust, 2009a, 2009b, 2009d)
- Good practice indicators to measure records management integration in ICT control systems (International Records Management Trust, 2009c).
- Five training modules on the management of records in electronic form that address aspects including the management context (S. Keakopa, Millar, O'Shea, Nordland, & Suderman, 2009), planning (Ardern, Miller, O'Shea, Nordland, & Smith, 2009), creation and use (Goh, Katu, Miller, Nordland, & Sebina, 2009), preservation (Brown, Katu, Sebina, & Seles, 2009) and management of personnel records (Griffin & Hoyle, 2009).

While a majority of these training resources were developed in conjunction with African scholars with the aim of addressing local realities there is a need for systematic assessment on the extent of the positive contribution such resources have made on research and professional development capacity in the African continent. This is because merely preparing

and making training resources available, even if freely, does not automatically translate into quality improvements in education and training (Katu, 2015b).

3. Research process

Two intertwined issues emerge from the foregoing, first there has not been an in-depth analysis on the curriculum offered in the national programmes with the exception of a few countries particularly in Southern Africa (Department of Arts and Culture [South Africa], 2010; Nengomasha, 2006). Second, there has been a call to increase the visibility of African scholars within global professional research initiatives. While an argument may be made that African professionals have been exposed to international developments, it may be that their own informed contributions have been hampered by the lack of constant and long exposure that can be made possible through research activities at a global level (Onyango, 2000). In response to these issues, the Department of Information Science at the University of South Africa has, since 2013, been coordinating the contributions of Team Africa that is part of the InterPARES Trust research project (InterPARES Trust, 2014b). Overall InterPARES Trust is exploring issues concerning digital records and data entrusted to the Internet with the goal of generating theoretical and methodological frameworks to develop a variety of instruments that ensure “public trust grounded on evidence of good governance, a strong digital economy, and a persistent digital memory.”(InterPARES Trust, 2014a). One of the case studies undertaken by Team Africa is entitled *Curriculum Alignments at Institutions of Higher Learning in Africa: Preparing Professionals to Manage Records Created in Networked Environments*. It is envisaged to be a systematic analysis of the curricula in different educational institutions in Africa and investigates the extent to which they address the changing environment. It will be carried out in four phases:

- The first phase is an extensive review of literature,
- The second is a survey of African education and training institutions that offer formal opportunities for archives and records professionals,
- The third phase is an assessment of curricula of select institutions representing different regional or programmatic flavours.
- The fourth phase will be a tracer study of select graduates from programmes in order to assess the extent to which their working environment reflects their educational and training background.

The objective of the project is to identify the gaps that exist and suggest ways of filling those gaps, cognizant of the fact that different nations require specific interventions rather than the usual one-size-fit-all approach.

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