

Chapter 4

Strategies for Digitizing Records in Academic Higher Education in South Africa: A Case Study of KwaZulu–Natal

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ABSTRACT

Digitizing records ensures that the continuation of information value remains accessible and usable in all academic institutions. The study aimed to establish strategies being used for digitization of records in higher education institutions in South Africa. A case study design was found appropriate to investigate the strategies of digitizing records in KwaZulu-Natal. The study employed the qualitative research approach and collected data from the literature. Content analysis was used for data analysis. Furthermore, the study used an analytical review of empirical findings conversant of digitization of records in academic institutions as the strategy. Literature was reviewed across the world and narrowed down to KwaZulu-Natal intending to trace strategies being used by universities in KwaZulu-Natal. The findings revealed that most records are stored on the digital platforms or network servers that the university manages. Users across the world get access to these records and it gives the platform to download all records. The findings further revealed that records are stored and digitized individually from the portable devices. The study recommended that institutions should offer more training to the staff.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Tertiary institutions conduct a lot of transactions which leads to the creation of numerous types of records ranging from admission, assessment, human resources, financial, memos, and other communication

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records. Records need to be digitized to make sure that they are safeguarded against loss and damages. Iwhiwhu (2005) highlighted that universities generate an immense quantity and bewildering variety of records every day. Various departments or faculties create and use records to document their activities. Institutions of higher learning, therefore, need to initiate a proper strategy for digitizing their records so that records can be stored and retrieved in a good way. Chinyemba (2011) argued that, without a robust record management program in place, universities cannot claim to be accountable and transparent. The researcher further state that universities are public organizations which have to be accountable and transparent and such can only be achieved through the presence of proper records and archives management systems.

According to Gorman (2006, p.621) digitization has been used chiefly as a way of preservation, but it should also be looked at as a means of improving access. It is perceived that digitization today is becoming a centre stage for the collection, storage, and accessibility of information in institutions and archival centre. However, some institutions in Kwazulu-Natal has yet to make a realistic declaration and committed program to embark on a digitization program to expand access and preserve the records and public archives in its custody.

Records are assets as they represent the accumulated intellectual capital of organizations. For an institution to have sound decision making, efficient and effective records play a vital role. Studies show that sound records management is the foundation for good governance in a democratic society (Chinyemba & Ngulube, 2005; King, 1997; Mullon, 2004; Ngulube, 2004; Shepherd, 2006; Willis, 2005). Good governance is characterized by transparency, accountability, due process, compliance with the set statutory framework, and information security (Wallace, 2004; Willis, 2005) as cited by Legodi (2011). Asogwa (2013) also postulated that tertiary institutions can only be effective and efficient if records management is considered a business process designed to support the institution's objectives.

Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005) argue that digitizing records could help universities to manage their information efficiently, fulfill their mandate, protect them from litigation, preserve their corporate memory, and foster accountability and good governance. Chinyemba (2011, p.2) notes that without a robust record management program in place universities cannot claim to be accountable and transparent. The researcher further state that universities are public organizations which have to be accountable and transparent and such can only be achieved through the presence of proper records and archives management systems. As Masuku and Makwanise (2012, p.179) also attest that, digital preservation strategies need to be developed and implemented to safeguard records. Failure to implement digital preservation strategies would result in a lack of access to archives or records of enduring value which is a blow to human rights activists, auditors, as well as the general populace whose rights are usually abused by those in power.

The study setting is a combination of five tertiary institutions which are the University of Zululand, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Mangosuthu University of Technology, Durban University of Technology, and the University of South Africa. Which all offers different programs such as faculty of arts, education, science, and administration in Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN) South Africa. The University of Zululand has two campuses the one in Richards's bay and on the main campus in Kwa-Dlangezwa and the University of Kwazulu-Natal has two campuses the one in Maritzburg and the one in Durban, as well as University of South Africa, has two campuses the one in Richards Bay and Durban. The study only focused on Kwa-Zulu Natal province, not other provinces in South Africa, since more studies have elaborated more on South Africa as a whole. Not much has been done based on the five universities.

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