Experiential Learning in Graduate Archival Education at the University of Botswana

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Abstract

Most curriculum components of archival graduate programmes consist of contextual knowledge, archival knowledge, complementary knowledge, practicum, and scholarly research. The practicum, now commonly known as experiential learning in the global hub, is now widely accepted in library and information studies (LIS) education as necessary and important. It is through experiential learning that, over and above the theoretical aspects of a profession, students are provided with the opportunity to learn by doing in a workplace environment. The University of Botswana's Master's in Archives and Records Management (MARM) programme has a six weeks experiential learning programme whose purpose is to expose prospective archivists and/or records managers to the real archival world in terms of practice as informed by archival theory. The main objective of the study was to determine the extent to which the University of Botswana's experiential learning component exposes students to real-life archival work to put into practice theoretical aspects learnt in the classroom as intended by the university guidelines. This study adopted a qualitative research design and collected data through interviews from participants selected through purposive and snowball sampling strategies. Documentary review supplemented the interviews. The data collected were analysed thematically in line with research objectives. The study determined that experiential learning does indeed expose students to the real world of work. It thus helps to bridge the gap between archival theory and practice for students without archives and records management work experience. For those with prior archival experience, experiential learning does not add value. This study recommends that students with prior archives and records management experience should rather, as an alternative to experiential learning, undertake supervised research, and write a research essay in a chosen thematic area in archives and records management.

Keywords: archives; archival theory; education; experiential learning; records; library

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and information science education; University of Botswana

Introduction

The education of archivists has been a topic of concern for long periods, with attention paid to its relationships with History and Library Science. Such discussions have included the advantages and disadvantages of classroom-based instruction versus hands-on experience, among others (Davis 1989). Khayundi (2011) observes that the education and training for archivists and records managers do not have an ideal programme. Various options exist for the education and training of archives and records management professionals and these are dependent on the purpose for which training is sought. There are extreme differences in the curriculum and these are visible from one continent to another, from one country to another, and from one university to another (Katuu 2015b). For example, owing to the lack of standardisation, courses are offered at certificate, higher certificate and diploma level with more or less the same duration. This is the state of affairs in the entire African countries. The differences emanate from the historical ties between former colonies and colonisers such that "archivists of countries that used to be colonies of others tend to receive the same kind of education as those of the colonizing country" (Duranti 2007, 41). According to the International Records Management Trust (2000), such education and training can be in the form of pre-appointment education, on-the-job introductory education and training, post-appointment continuing education, awareness raising for non-records management staff, graduate level advanced education, and short training courses for skills development. This study determines the purpose of the MARM experiential learning component and explores from its graduates their views on its capability to expose students to the real world of archival practice. It also suggests ways of improving the delivery of the experiential learning in order to enable graduates to apply archival theory into practice.

Background to Graduate Archival Education

Modern archival education has been in existence for a century (Cox 2015) and its importance in the archives and records management profession is not disputed (Sweeney 1984). The Society of American Archivists (SAA) and the University of British Columbia have been at the forefront of providing guidelines for graduate archival education (Cox 2015; Eastwood 1983; SAA 2016; Walters 1993). According to Duranti (2007), since the inception of the SAA in 1936, the SAA concerned itself with graduate archival education. It charged committees with the responsibility of examining graduate archival education issues. It later issued guidelines for it, rather than making a systematic effort to encourage the creation of programmes, monitoring them, or even only nudging universities to respect the guidelines. The Committee on Education and Professional Development (CEPD) established a curriculum subcommittee to develop a new set of guidelines that were published in 1988. Duranti (2007) adds that the Canadians through the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) (1988) went beyond the SAA guidelines by publishing guidelines that called for a two-

year, full-time autonomous master's degree in archival studies with "full academic status" in the university.

The education of archives and records management professionals in Africa has been an issue of interest since African countries gained independence since the 1960s. Regional centres for the education of archivists were established in Ghana and Senegal for anglophone and francophone countries (Katuu 2015a; Katuu and Ngoepe 2015). However, these lasted for a decade, paving the way for nationalised educational programmes, which continue to provide support for current professionals.

In Botswana, archival education is part of LIS programmes by the University of Botswana (UB) through the Department of Library and Information Studies (DLIS) which was established in 1979 (Jain and Jorosi 2017). It initially trained paraprofessional staff and brought them up to diploma level. The DLIS is highly regarded in Africa as a centre of excellence for LIS education and training. It has made some unique contribution through research, publication and service to the development of the discipline throughout the continent. Its LIS programmes reflect the various needs and demands of Africa's library and information market (Jain and Jorosi 2017). Specifically, the department offers two non-graduate diploma programmes in Library and Information Studies and Archives and Records Management, a Bachelor's degree in Knowledge and Information with specialisation streams in archives and records management, knowledge management, and LIS (Jain and Jorosi 2017; UB 2019). Postgraduate programmes offered are Master's Degree programmes in Library and Information Studies and Archives and Records Management, and MPhil and PhD programmes in LIS (Jain and Jorosi 2015). In order to remain relevant for the job market and the emerging global society, the DLIS continuously reviews its teaching curricula to ensure that it deals with current trends in the profession. For all the archives and records management programmes, students go through experiential learning.

Experiential Learning in LIS Education

It is common for LIS educators to require that as part of the requirements to complete archival education, students have to go through experiential learning. This helps them to build a better understanding of the connection between theory and professional practice (Južnič and Pymm 2016). Terms such as the practicum, internships, labs, volunteerism, performance-based learning, fieldwork or service learning and work-integrated learning have been used in literature to portray what can be regarded as experiential learning (Bird, Chu, and Oguz 2015; Carleton University 2018; Južnič and Pymm 2016; Lim and Bloomquist 2015). The term experiential learning is adopted for this study. In addition, where the word practicum has been used, let it be known that it carries the same meaning as experiential learning in the context of this study.

The University of Colorado Denver (2019), defines experiential learning as "a process through which students develop knowledge, skills, and values from direct experiences

outside a traditional academic setting. Experiential learning encompasses a variety of activities including internships, service learning, undergraduate research, study abroad, and other creative and professional work experiences." Cherry (2019) simply defines it as learning from experience. It is a theory of learning proposed by psychologist David Kolb who was influenced by the work of other theorists including John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget. It is a type of learning from which knowledge is created through some transformation of experience. Accordingly, the knowledge acquired results from the combination of grasping and transforming the experience. Slavich and Zimbardo (2012, 594), in their formulation of transformational teaching, described the multidimensional importance of experience in learning as follows:

> [E]xperiential lessons provide students with an opportunity to experience concepts first-hand and, as such, give students a richer, more meaningful understanding of course concepts and of how they operate in the real world. … They enhance the affective quality of the course content. This occurs both when students are engaged in solving problems that are part of the activities and when they are analyzing, sharing, discussing, and reflecting on their personal reactions. … It can significantly improve students' memory for concepts insofar as the information gets stored in autobiographical memory. … Experiential lessons have the ability to shape students' beliefs about learning and about the self. … They can lead to significant personal insights, including a greater awareness of one's personally held perspectives—as well as an improved awareness of other people's experience—with the possibility to enhance these attributes through critical reflection.

As alluded to by the Slavich and Zimbardo (2012) in the preceding quotation, experiential learning takes place when students are placed in a situation where they think and interact, and learn in and from a real-world environment. According to Cornell University (2019), it involves active participation of the student in the planning, development and execution of learning activities. The learning experience is then shaped by the problems and pressures arising from the real-world situation and occurs most effectively outside the classroom. The University of Colorado Denver (2019) indicates that a well-planned, supervised and assessed experiential learning programme can stimulate academic inquiry by promoting interdisciplinary learning, civic engagement, career development, cultural awareness, leadership, and other professional and intellectual skills. Such a programme contains learning that is considered "experiential" and which contains the following elements:

- reflection, critical analysis and synthesis;
- opportunities for students to take initiative, make decisions, and be accountable for the results;
- opportunities for students to engage intellectually, creatively, emotionally, socially, or physically; and

- a designed learning experience that includes the possibility to learn from natural consequences, mistakes, and successes.

Experiential learning is a common feature among LIS educators globally. This is because these educational intuitions recognise that professional programmes must prepare workers to become professional practitioners in their chosen field of practice (Wrenn and Wrenn 2009). In the US, right from the beginning of LIS education, there were debates about the relative importance of the work experience (Bird, Chu, and Oguz 2015). Experiential learning ushers new LIS professionals into the field and enable them to engage with future colleagues in a real-work environment. It is highly regarded in North America because students do not only enjoy its benefits but also by educational intuitions as from experiential learning feedback, they can assess and align their curricula to current practice (Bird and Crumpton 2014).

In a study conducted among Canadian LIS students, it emerged that field experiences are important for connecting classroom learning to practice and helped to illuminate the realities of librarianship (Južnič and Pymm 2011). It also made it relatively easier for the students to have an understanding of concepts and principles they had learnt in the classroom, while on the other hand, students felt that they only really learnt about how to be librarians through the experiences during their experiential learning programme (Bilodeau and Carson 2015; Hoffmann and Berg 2014).

The importance of experiential learning has also been confirmed in a comparative study conducted in Australia and Slovenia. Although the two countries are geographically distant from each other, the findings revealed that experiential learning in a physical workplace is still a key component of LIS education (Južnič and Pymm 2016). The study also indicated that much as it is important to collaborate with industry in order to build practical skills and knowledge, it was also important that the experiential learning programme be undertaken in a systematic manner based upon educational and pedagogical foundations, and a genuine desire on part of the employer for a collaborative partnership (Južnič and Pymm 2016).

Experiential Learning at the University of Botswana

The UB offers a two year MARM programme through coursework and dissertation. The programme runs for four semesters (two years) for full-time students and extend to six semesters (three years) on a part-time basis (UB 2017). Students with any bachelor's degree from the UB or any other recognised university or equivalent institution with at least a minimum of a second-class lower division or equivalent or a minimum of 3.0 GPA qualifies for the MARM. Furthermore, holders of a pass degree at undergraduate level in any subject with two years' relevant work experience are eligible for admission into the MARM programme. Thus, some students without archives and records management experience can be admitted into the programme. This makes experiential learning all the more necessary (UB 2017). During the first year, students mainly undertake coursework. During the winter vacation, they go through experiential

learning. For part-time students, experiential learning begins during the winter vacation before starting their last year.

Archival Theory and Practice

Since this paper is largely about archival theory and practice, it is therefore befitting that it briefly discusses archival theory and practice. Archivists often make a distinction between archival theory and practice (Livelton 1991). According to Duranti (1993), archival theory refers to the analysis of the ideas archivists hold about the nature of the material they work with. Such an analysis involves an examination of the meaning of those ideas and how they should be treated. The analysis of how to treat archival material is referred to as methodology (Duranti 1993; Eastwood 1994; Livelton 1991). The application of archival theory and methodology in real-work situations is practice (Duranti 1993; Livelton 1991). All these then form the discipline of archival science (Duranti 2007). The same writer further elaborates that:

> The term science is useful because it is commonly divided into its pure and applied aspects. The pure side comprises theoretical and methodological ideas, while the applied side embraces the many uses made of those ideas in real situations. Archivists commonly refer to these applications as practice. Thus, theory, methodology, and practice constitute together the pure and applied science of archives. (Duranti 2007, 49)

Notably, the issue of balancing theory and practice in archival education has been contentious (Jimerson 2010). Some writers have questioned the existence of archival theory itself and supporters of that view hold that archivists should learn practical skills so that they can "do" archives (Roberts 1987). Others advocate for the teaching of archival theory in graduate archival education and forget practice (Jimerson 2010). Cook (2000) who says that theory is "the complement to practice, and theory and practice should interact and cross-fertilize each other" holds a more balanced view. Jimerson (2010) argues that archival education should include a solid introduction to both theory and practice. This thesis of this paper is then to get the views of MARM graduates on whether upon learning archival theory and methodology at the university, they were exposed to archival practice during the practicum component of the programme such that they can apply it at work. In the context of this study, archival practice includes activities to do with records management work.

Intent of Experiential Learning in Graduate Archival Education

According to Sweeney (1984), the purpose of experiential learning is to show prospective archivists what the real archival world can be like and to give them a broad cross-cut of different experiences and points of view in archival practice. Sweeney (1984, 267) indicates that:

> The purpose of the practicum, sandwiched into the summer between first and second years, is actually to show prospective archivists what the real archival world can be like

and to give them a broad crosscut of different experiences and points of view, such as is provided by the Public Archives of Canada as a sponsor institution. Students, in turn, can provide willing and eager hands for tasks the sponsoring body wishes done. The practicum, filling the gap between the years, also succeeds in making the students feel more than ever that they eat, drink, breath, and live archives. It has led some of us to the conclusion that 'where two or more archivists are gathered, so shall archives be discussed among them.'

Stielow (1990) opines that field experiences in educational programmes are widely accepted for educational programmes worth their salt. Cox (1988) viewed experiential learning as an integral part of archival education in that it offered opportunities for students to obtain first-hand experience in an archival repository. Stielow (1990) indicates that the SAA's programme "Standard for Archival Education: The Practicum of 1980" was designed to be flexible but was actually rigid. This is because it proclaimed it "essential that the practicum provide the student with experience in all major facets of an archival programme" and specifically prescribed acquisition, processing, preservation, and reference as the four areas of coverage. This shows that experiential learning guidelines thought more of archivists who would work in archival repositories and less of records management professionals who would manage current records. The purpose of the experiential learning of the UB MARM is to expose students to practical on-the-job experience of archival work under the tutelage of an information professional in a work setting (Totolo and Jorosi 2017).

Problem Statement

Archival education endeavours to prepare would-be professionals for the world of work, like other forms of graduate professional education (Gilliland-Swetland 1998). It is through work placement or experiential learning that professional education prepares students for the job market in the short term. In the long term, the knowledge garnered through education and research enable professional knowledge attained to promote, develop, and test "the professional knowledge base in light of the challenges to theory and practice presented by technological and other advances" (Gilliland-Swetland 1998, 93). Experiential learning in graduate archival programmes endeavours to empower graduates to put what they learnt theoretically into practice in the workplace. The UB's MARM programme has an experiential learning component. Tracer studies that ascertained whether experiential learning prepared graduates for the work environment are rare. The problem that motivated this study is that not much is known as to whether the experiential learning component of MARM prepares graduates for the world of work. This study therefore seeks to establish the extent to which experiential learning bridges the gap between archival theory and practice, thus giving the graduates the confidence to perform the job roles of an archivist or records manager in a work setting.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this paper were to:

- determine the purpose of the MARM experiential learning component;

- establish the views of the graduates on the capability of the experiential learning to expose students to the real world of archival practice;

- determine the roles played by the supervising lecturer and the host supervisor at the institution towards the success of experiential learning; and

- recommend ways of improving the delivery of experiential learning in order to enable the successful achievement of its objectives.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

A theoretical framework guides good and successful research (Grant and Osanloo 2014). This study is guided by Kolb's experiential learning theory (ELT). According to Kolb (1984, 38), "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience." Kolb's ELT works on two levels. The first is a four-stage cycle of learning while the second comprises separate learning styles. According to McLeod (2017), ELT involves the acquisition of abstract concepts that can be applied flexibly in a range of situations. The central tenet in Kolb's theory is that the impetus for the development of new concepts is provided by new experiences. The four stages of Kolb's ELT are presented in Figure 1. Lam and Chan (2013, 2) concisely explain ELT, as follows:

- Concrete experience: **Doing.** Through participation in learning activities, students get hands-on experience of problem-solving tasks. The experience is personal and involves individual affections.

- Reflection: **Observing**. Students recall their memory or look at records of the learning activities, they review and reflect on the process either individually or in a group. Learners observe others' behaviours during the activities as well.

- Abstract conceptualisation: **Thinking**. Students generalise knowledge and theory from the previous experience based on the reflection.

- Active experiment: **Planning**. Students modify existing concepts and knowledge with the new theory they come up with and apply in later occasions.
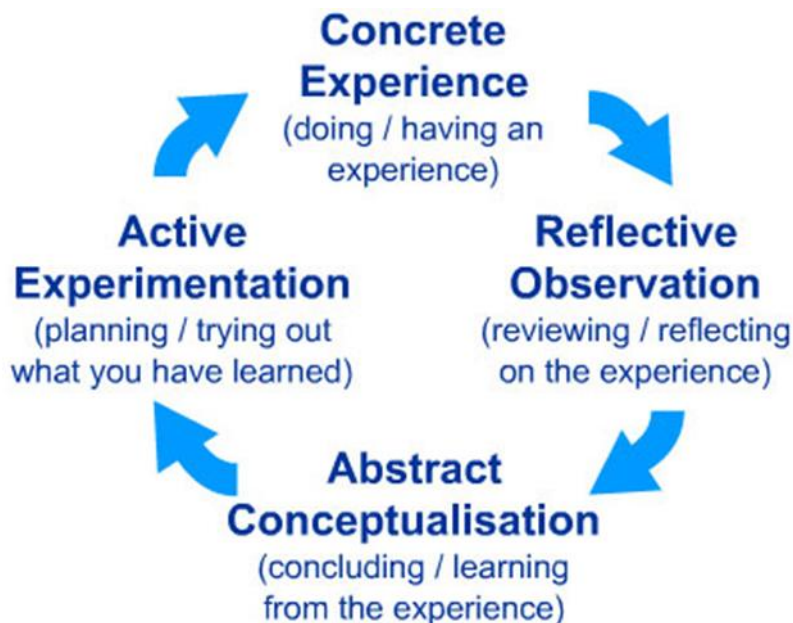
Figure 1: Four-stage cycle of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (McLeod 2017)

ELT provides the intellectual basis for the practice of experiential learning and a response to John Dewey's call for a theory of experience to guide educational innovation (Kolb and Kolb 2017). ELT is a synthesis of the works of other scholars who gave experiential learning "a central role in their theories of human learning and development" (Kolb and Kolb 2017, 10). The scholars commonly referred to as the "foundational scholars of experiential learning" include William James, John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Carl Jung, Mary Parker Follett, Carl Rogers, and Paulo Freire. Their contribution to ELT spanned a period over 100 years beginning at the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century.

ELT is applicable not only in the formal education classroom but in all arenas of life. The process of learning from experience is universal, present in human activity everywhere all the time (Kolb and Kolb 2017; Passarelli and Kolb 2011). Accordingly, Passarelli and Kolb (2011, 12) are of the idea that "the experiential learning cycle is actually a learning spiral. When a concrete experience is enriched by reflection, given meaning by thinking and transformed by action, the new experience created becomes richer, broader and deeper."

Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature. Qualitative studies aim to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell 2014, 32). It is often based on interpretivism (Thanh and Le Thanh 2015, 25). Interviews were the principal data collection tool. They were supplemented by content

analysis of data obtained from literature related to the experiential learning as it relates to graduate archival education. Thematic content analysis was guided by themes derived from the research objectives. The participants were coded as participants 1 to 16 to represent the 16 study participants. The participants were the UB's MARM graduates who graduated between the years 2008 and 2017. The snowball sampling strategy was used to select study participants who are scattered all over the country working for different organisations, both public and private. According to Sharma (2017, 752), "snowball sampling or chain sampling, chain-referral sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances." When it is hard to reach populations, as it was in the current study, link-tracing sampling is an effective means of collecting data on population members (Handcock and Gile 2011). This was the principal reason why this sampling strategy was preferred for this study. In terms of data analysis, all the responses from the 16 participants were organised into themes in line with research objectives while some of their responses were quoted verbatim to emphasise assertions made.

Study Findings

A list of open-ended interview questions were emailed to the participants and the data analysis was subsequently done after reaching out to 25 known MARM graduates who participated in the study. Of the 25 emails to potential participants, 16 were returned. These formed the basis for the data analysis. The participants went through experiential learning between 2008 and 2018. The following are the study findings and they have been organised in accordance with the study objectives.

Purpose of the MARM Experiential Learning Component

The first objective of the study sought to appreciate the purpose of the experiential learning with data collected through document analysis and from interviews with the participants. According to Eastwood (1983), the whole intent of experiential learning is to enable students to be guided by an experienced archivist to build skills and knowledge. He adds that "more than that, students need to experience actual working circumstances to test the ideas they have struggled with in the classroom." Pacios (2013) pronounces that the aim of experiential learning is to enable students to be integrated into a learning context set within real fields related to the hands-on, practical side of the professional role to be undertaken. This gives them the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, information, skills and abilities needed for professional practice in a determined sphere of the labour market.

The findings of the study show that the purpose of the UB's experiential learning component of MARM is to provide students with hands-on experience under the guidance of an information professional in a work setting. It is also meant to benefit the host institution. Furthermore, it is designed to help students to practice with report writing, keeping of a dairy and general communication in the work environment. According to Totolo and Jorosi (2017), the specific objectives of experiential learning

are to provide students with an opportunity to perform professional work under the guidance of a supervisor; develop the student's ability to synthesise knowledge acquired during lectures, practical field visits and fieldwork; provide students the opportunity to practice skills as well as apply concepts learnt in the classroom; provide students with an opportunity to build confidence in their ability to assume the roles of professionals; provide new entrants to the profession with an opportunity to make contacts and scene references for future job applications; provide the DLIS with an opportunity to market itself and evaluate the appropriateness of its curriculum; initiate new entrants into the information work (professional socialisation); provide students with valuable insights into the day-to-day operations of library and information services; and provide the students with on opportunity to gain hands-on experience of many library and information tasks and processes (Totolo and Jorosi 2017). The objectives of the experiential learning as put forward by the two scholars relate very well with the first two objectives of this study, which are to determine the purpose of the MARM experiential learning component and to establish the views of the graduates on the capability of experiential learning to expose them to the real world of archival practice.

Notably, the general purpose of the objectives as put forward by Totolo and Jorosi (2017) are consistent with those listed by Južnič and Pymm (2016). The latter's objectives are grouped into those meant to benefit what they call a triangle of stakeholders, being the students themselves, the host institution and the training institution offering archival educational programmes. Furthermore, a study, which provides an overview of experiential learning in the library and information science curriculum in Latin America by Arakaki and De la Vega (2011), also alluded to the fact that experiential learning benefits students, educational institutions and the work environment. When asked about the purpose of experiential learning, some of the graduates responded as follows:

> It is meant to apply theory learnt in the classroom to the actual work in the office and to use the learnings for continuous improvement especially with focused feedback from the field. (Participant 13)

> The purpose the practical attachment was to put the theory into practice, thus to seek knowledge and depth understanding of a wide range of organizational issues such as the organisation environment, the organisation's legal framework and mandate and the organisation's information environment amongst others. (Participant 16)

The study participants clearly understood the purpose of experiential learning. They also appreciated the benefits accrued from going through the practicum in their graduate archival education. According to Južnič and Pymm (2016), in LIS courses, experiential learning serves as a specific bond between theory on the one hand and practical work and the profession on the other. In a paper about career choices for archivists and information managers, Uhde and Hoy (2012) said experiential learning or internship prepared students for the world of work. They added that employers (host

organisations), through structured internships, gave students opportunities as future employees with greater understanding of how theory works in practice. In terms of whether the duration of experiential learning enabled the MARM graduates to put into practice the theory learnt in the classroom, the participants gave mixed responses. For example:

> For me it was more than enough because I was attached to my workplace. I was not learning anything new. My view is that serving students in the field of records management should be exempted from the practicum. Rather, we can write a term paper on a topic agreed upon by the academic supervisor and the student. (Participant 15)

> Six weeks is just too short for one to grasp most of the skills required. There are many aspects to record-keeping practices which one cannot get hold off within six weeks. I feel the attachment period should be extended to three months. This will allow students to further learn on issues such a classification scheme development or review, retention schedule review or development and be given the chance to present the challenges and changes required to the organisational staff. (Participant 7)

Generally, the participants said that they were not happy with the duration of the practicum and felt it was too short. Those participants who already had archives and records management experience before going for the practicum put this assertion forward. The few who said the time was not enough were mainly those graduates who were mostly public sector employees in other sectors other than an archives and records management environment. An earlier study by Stielow (1990) shows that students in practicum were required to undergo 140 hours of practical work in an archival repository. In a study that undertook an assessment of the practicum by students, Pacios (2013) found that the duration of the practicum was a month but one third of the students felt the time was insufficient. A practicum is supposed to benefit the host institution. With the limited time, the institution is bound to accrue minimal benefits. Notably, host institutions can use the practicum as a platform from which to source employees (Južnič and Pymm 2016), but that will not happen if students are half-baked at the end of the practicum. A perusal of these objectives point to the fact that six weeks is not adequate to develop skills to learn and actually perform more demanding archival tasks such as records appraisal, arrangement and description, and classification of records, just to mention a few.

Capability of MARM Practicum to Expose Students to the Real World of Archival Practice

Pacios (2013) declares that the practicum capacitates students to put into practice, in a real-work setting, the theory learnt in class. The second objective of the study was to establish from MARM graduates whether the practicum had the capability to expose students to the real world of archival practice. The graduates really appreciated the time spent doing the practicum and their view was that indeed the practicum exposed them to the real work of archival practice. The students undertook the following successfully:

- development of a records policy;

- appraisal of records;

- transcription of oral history;

- processing of archives;

- accessioning archival material;

- acquisition of archives; and

- providing archival reference services.

The range of practical work performed by the students is testimony that the practicum is a necessity in the education of archivists. Some of the actual voices of the participants were as follows:

> I learnt how to administer access to archival materials to the researchers. I was also engaged on acquiring and processing of the private archives of Mr Michael Kitso Dingake. I also learnt how to transcribe oral history at BNARS. [Mr Dingake was a prominent retired Botswana politician who also fought against apartheid in South Africa and was even jailed at Robben Island] (Participant 8)

> Yes, the practical was still relevant to me, as the archival skills I acquired assisted me during the processing of Dr Ian Khama's personal archives. I had an objective at Gaborone Records Centre, which required me to conduct storage areas, which kept public sector records, and I did so at the State House. During the assessment, one of the objectives was to set up President Archival Office. That was the time I used the skills of processing of archives and making the available for use by the President through developing some finding aids for retrieval purposes. (Participant 10)

> Though I had archives and records management work experience, the practicum gave me the opportunity to do something I had never done before. I was able to design a Records Management Policy for the host institution. (Participant 1)

The responses show that some students already had archives and records management experience when they went for the practicum. Their responses contrasted each other. Participant 1 had records management experience but still benefited from the practicum while Participant 11 felt the practicum was a waste of time as nothing new was learnt during the practicum. For example, Participant 11 said:

> It was not relevant to those who were already records management officers. They have the practical skills even more knowledgeable than the supervisors do. It was just waste of time.

The assertion by Participant 11 echoes similar sentiments to the one also put across by a student in a similar situation as revealed by a study that sought to answer the question whether internships and student work experience were helpful. It emerged from the

study that the students initially felt a practicum was not necessary because they already had work experience in their field of work (Hoy 2011). However, upon reflection later, they wished they could have benefited from doing it in an environment different to their own, as that would have been beneficial to them.

Generally, the statements by the participants echo what has already been cited by literature as the usefulness of a practicum in the education of archives and records management practitioners. Jimerson (2010) observes that one of the prominent issues in archival education has been the desire to strike a balance between archival theory and practice. This has seen some archival education programmes ceasing to teach processing methodology because it is a skill best learnt on the job. Stielow (1990) then argues for the need to have a practicum that represents the shared interests of the profession and the three key players in the experience being the student, the educator, and the on-site supervisor. Students must be recognised for the advanced theoretical knowledge that they can bring to the site. It is notable that MARM graduates were able to make worthy contributions to the host institutions such as the development of records management policies, a records classification scheme, appraisal of records, describing archives, processing of private archives, and boxing of semi-current records. Južnič and Pymm (2016, 92) affirm the importance of the practicum by saying that "as future professionals, in undertaking a practicum, students have a chance to gain expertise and build their confidence through practical training and experience." It is still relevant for those with experience as they can try something new and broaden their knowledge of the profession as a whole. For the ones with little or no experience, the practicum offers an opportunity to get hands-on experience, which is an essential part of the learning process (Južnič and Pymm 2016). That said, it is the opinion of Jimerson (2010) that for archivists to meet the vital archival needs of the future, educational programmes need to be tailored in a way that they provide a fresh and vigorous approach to prepare students for their careers.

Roles of Academic and Workplace Supervisors towards the Success of the Practicum

The third objective of the study sought to assess the roles played by the supervising lecturer and the host supervisor at the institution towards the success of the practicum. The responses were mixed but generally positive for the supervisors at the host institutions. The roles played by host institution supervisors included those of being a mentor and supportive host. The findings indicate that the host supervisors took the student archivists (records managers) in the practicum under their wing and showed them how things are done in the real-work environment. For example, one participant said the host supervisor gave them an overview of the workings of the Records Management Unit before actually giving them an assignment to do in the office. The following are some of the direct responses of the participants and are meant to emphasise the kind of support the student interns received:

> The host supervisor was supportive in the sense that resources were availed to enable me to complete the assignment I had to do as a project for the practicum. I was allocated one intern officer and other resources needed for the exercise in the form of stationery including file covers, archival boxes. (Participant 1)

> He took his time to take me through the classification scheme and involved me in departmental meetings. He also gave me the opportunity to work on the information centre as I had experience in library studies. (Participant 4)

Madway (2011) argues that workplace supervisors serve as mentors to students during their practical placement and contribute to new archivists learning their roles and new perspectives in the work environment. They are also able to utilise the students to reduce their backlog of unprocessed manuscripts and other records. The benefits of the practicum have been appreciated by the workplace supervisors because going through the practicum itself contributed to the professional education and development of both the students and the supervisors (Schrader 2017).

Regarding the roles of academic supervisors, the findings of the study show a mix of responses, which commended the lecturers for their support while others lamented that their lecturers were not as supportive as expected. In general terms, those who were happy with the support given by the supervising lecturers indicated that they reported at places where the students were attached to communicate some expectations from the students, and these included compliance with workplace rules and regulations and general work ethics. That aside, the lecturers also provided guidance in terms of how to structure the practicum report, which was graded, and part of their continuous assessment. Furthermore, the student interns said such lecturers even phoned them and their host supervisors to check their progress. Participant 9 said of the supervisor allocated to them:

> He was gentle and he advised me to breakdown the activities that I have conducted and explain in-depth what I have done and how the situation was before carrying out the activity that contributed positively to my host organisation.

The study established that some academic supervisors were not as supportive as others were. For instance, some said they went through the whole period of the practicum without meeting their supervising lecturer. Some of their responses were as follows:

> Frankly speaking, in accordance with the schedule, my supervisor was supposed to check me during the third week of the attachment but that did not happen at all. I completed and submitted my attachment report without meeting supervisor. (Participant 2)

> The lecturer was not supportive at all. He showed up the last week just for assessment. (Participant 8)

> Since I completed the attachment without a supervisor that means there was no support from the lecturer who was supposed to supervise me. (Participant 11)

It is clear that the graduates expected more from the supervising lecturers during the practicum. In general terms, they were not happy with the support availed by the supervisory lecturers. Some even finished the practicum without meeting the supervisory lecturers while some met them when they came to conduct an assessment. Schrader (2017, 2–3) undertook a survey of practicum supervisors in the MLIS programme of the University of Alberta in Canada and they put the following as the benefits of going through experiential learning:

- bringing a different perspective, with fresh eyes;
- gaining new knowledge;
- helping and mentoring new professionals;
- giving back to the profession, and especially SLIS undertaking library projects and activities;
- getting an opportunity to vet potential employees, a first-hand look at some potential new staff members; and
- developing personal professional skills.

These benefits will not filter down to the students going through the practicum if instances where students go through the practicum without the academic supervisor do take place. In addition, as the profession becomes entangled with sophisticated technology and the organisations in which professionals work become more complex, maintaining the bond between academia and the profession becomes more crucial to ensure that education and practical work remain connected (Južnič and Pymm 2016). "Absent supervisors" do not help this important connection between educators and practitioners and the chance to reassess and align curricula with current practice and trends will be missed.

Recommendations

The last objective of the study requested the MARM graduates to suggest ways in which the delivery of the practicum could be improved in order to enable graduates to apply archival theory into practice better. The suggestions were as follows:

- The duration of the practicum should at least be increased to three months to allow the students to acquire practical experience from the theory learnt, as the six weeks period is not enough. With more time to do practical aspects of archives and records management, students would acquire practical skills (Magara, Bukiwa, and Kayiki 2011).

- The university should consider establishing model archives on campus to let MARM students get practical experience from there, as some international students may not always get permission to do the practicum in public institutions in Botswana.

- Students with prior records management experience should be attached to an archives environment in order to expose them to archival work practices and vice versa for those with archives experience to be more exposed to records management activities. According to Yakel (2000, 317), "graduates of archival education programmes represent the future of the profession. Their insights, attitudes, skills, and knowledge must sustain the profession in the twenty-first century." The practicum represents one of the ways in which students can assert themselves in the profession and that can happen if they have proper skills and knowledge to perform as employees. The practicum allows students to hone their skills in readiness for the job market.

- Students with both experience in archives work and managing current records should be exempted from the practicum. It is recommended that these students write a term paper about a chosen area of archives and records management in place of the practicum. This then calls for a review of the programme (practicum) delivery. According to Jimerson (2010), archival educational programmes should go beyond concentrating on basic components such as theory, methodology, and practice and deal with the needs of future archivists. The programmes should be mindful of skills and grounding in both technology and interpersonal skills and cultural understanding in order to lead the archival institutions of the future.

- The academic supervisors should intensify their supervision giving it the attention it deserves otherwise it would be a lost opportunity if they never show up during the duration of the practicum to mentor students. Their visibility will enable them to provide much needed guidance and even promote sustainable collaboration between the university and host institutions.

- The UB academic supervisors should emphasise an introductory meeting with the host organisation to ensure support from the beginning of the programme and to communicate expectations.

- The role of the host supervisors should be clearly communicated. Their ability to mentor the student during the practicum should also be determined before the start of the practicum lest they be at the same level with the student in terms of practical experience. In a tracer study of the graduates of the University of Namibia in the Department of Information and Communication Studies for the years 2000 to 2007, Nengomasha and Chiware (2009) reported that one of the findings was that former students felt that they had little practical experience, which did not help them once they were employed.

- The university should consider formalising the practicum initiative through a memorandum of understanding with institutions that are receptive to offering

the practicum. This will strengthen relations between the university and industry and further provide a platform for dialogue in offering appropriate education and training required in the industry.

Conclusion

The role of the practicum in graduate archival education is monumental in terms of enabling students to practice in the real-work situation what they learnt in class as theory. The length of the practicum has come about as one that needs to be extended, at least for those who went through the practicum without any archives and records management experience. Although students may deem the practicum too short, it does expose students to the world of archival work as some participants contributed towards the improvement of the archives and records management service. Initiatives they participated in such as the description of archives, processing of private archives, development of records management policies and records classification schemes are core archival work. The exposure may have been minimal but the principle is that they would apply what they learn during the practicum in their own work environments. Duranti (2007) points out that archival schools cannot pretend to create complete archivists. They, however, strive to prepare students to continue with their education while working in any kind of archives. Continuous practice can partly provide such education. Currently, the literature is skewed more towards the practicum being undertaken in an archival repository. In the context of Botswana, such a scenario is not realistic as students are attached in a records management environment other than an archival repository.

This study has also noted that the practicum has the potential to build relationships between the university as an educational institution and host organisations as places where workplace practicum can be obtained. This can even lead to formalised agreements between the two such that the university has the industry to support its practicum needs while the host organisation benefits from student contributions. The students themselves benefit from the programme as it enables them to put into practice theories learnt at university. The findings of the study have brought to the fore an opportunity for the university to determine whether in its current format, the practicum for DLIS should be continued or reviewed in the face of new demands. At the end of it all, Gilliland-Swetland (2000) opines that the mission of archival educators is to prepare graduates to work in their local environment and the global archival community. For that to happen, graduates have to be grounded in both theory and practice, including dealing with archival material (methodology).

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