




Evaluating the National University of Lesotho's Records Management practices with the ISO 15489

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Background: Universities create different types, categories and classes of records during their main activities which stem from learning, teaching, research and community engagement. The information contained in the records is used in the daily activities of an institution, therefore, they need to be arranged systematically to facilitate easy access and avoid loss of misfiling or damage.

Objectives: This article aims to evaluate the National University of Lesotho's (NUL) Records Management practices in alignment with the ISO 15489 standard and to further make recommendations based on their practices.

Method: A qualitative research method using a process evaluation approach was adopted with the employment of interview schedules. Data were analysed through descriptive content analysis with the additional use of thematic analysis.

Results: The findings of this study indicate that most of the Records Management practices of NUL are neither standardised nor aligned to the records management ISO 15489 standard. The findings show that the NUL records-keeping staff mostly apply their knowledge and experience when performing their record-keeping functions.

Conclusion: The research assessed only some of the determinants of Records Management in a relatively small sample in the NUL. An obvious limitation of the study is that it utilised a sample of employees of NUL, and the findings of this study cannot be generalised beyond the sample that took part in the study.

Contribution: This study highlights the significance of aligning all Records Management practices with the ISO 15489 Standard.

Keywords: records; Records Management; ISO 15489 standard; National University of Lesotho; practices.

Introduction

Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005, n.d.) state that while on a quest to fulfil their core business of learning, teaching, research and community development, universities create various records. These records need to be managed properly to avoid misplacement and accidental damage which will result in the loss of valuable evidence forever. According to Seniwoliba, Mahama and Abilla (2017:30), records are very important in higher education institutions (HEIs) for the establishment, existence, development, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and renewal of its programmes. Seniwoliba et al. (2017:30) continue to emphasise the significance of records as an information resource for the sustained survival of HEIs and therefore suggest that records should be managed and treated with the same importance given to other resources within the HEIs. In addition, Abdulrahman (2015:48) also agrees that there is a need for universities to pay attention to proper management of their records for the sake of efficiency and effectiveness. Akuffo and Adams (2016:62) show that studies have been conducted on Records Management (RM) in various African countries (e.g., South Africa, Botswana and Uganda) with a focus on the assessment of RM practices in tertiary education institutions. Nengomasha (2013:02) also observes that several African authors have written about the problems of RM in different organisations in Africa. However, these studies, that have been found, do not focus specifically on the evaluation of RM practices in line with the International Standard-ISO 15489 on RM.

Many scholars in different disciplines have expressed the value of effective RM in HEIs. Other scholars have also observed that universities, in the same way, should engage in processes that

facilitate proper management of their own records (Seniwoliba et al. 2017:30). It is therefore recommended that their Records Management practices align with the International Organization for Standardization ISO 15489. For instance, the National University of Lesotho (NUL) can realise more benefits if its records are managed in alignment with ISO 15489. According to ISO 15489 (2016:18), RM practices aligned to standards ensure adherence to legislation, policy, and rules and regulations by the institutions. This article aimed to evaluate NUL RM practices' alignment with the ISO 15489 standard and to make recommendations pertaining to the improvement of their RM practices.

Literature review

This section will cover the concept of Records Management, the lifecycle of records. Furthermore, it will address the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

The concept of records management

Webster, Hare and McLeod (1999:03) as cited by Yusof and Chell (2000:12) observe that the concept and meaning of RM has been, and still is, a hotly debated theme among information professionals. According to Yusof and Chell (1999:12), earlier definitions of RM have focussed more on avoiding the loss of important pieces of paper (valuable records) while also ensuring the proper disposition of those considered to be of insignificant value. These two scholars conducted a study about the definition of RM where various definitions by different authors were analysed. Yusof and Chell (1999:12) observed that some definitions are easy and straight to the point while some are more complex and include many issues in RM.

The objective of RM is to ensure that organisations and individuals can access, process and use organisational records efficiently and effectively. This involves various broad activities that encompass the gathering of information and data from different sources, arranging and categorising, storing and distributing the data to relevant individuals at the right time (Kadie, Mokhtar & Yusof 2024:132). In essence, RM is viewed to be built on a strong foundation of information; therefore, the meticulous recording of pertinent and heavily substantial data should be held as the most significant practice for the purpose of preserving, verifying and retaining the most valuable organisational resources (Kadie et al. 2024:133).

According to ISO 15489-1:2016 (2016:V), records can be regarded as both evidence of business-related activities and organisational information assets. They can only be differentiated from other information assets by the roles as evidenced in the process of business transactions and through the reliance on data and metadata. It is important to note that metadata for records can be used to indicate and further preserve context, and manage records according to correctly applied rules. Records Management can be generally regarded as the field of management that is responsible

for ensuring efficient and systematic control which involves the creation, receipt, maintenance, utilisation and disposal of records. These processes also include capturing and maintaining business activity transactional evidence contained in the record format (ISO 15489-1:2016, 2016:3).

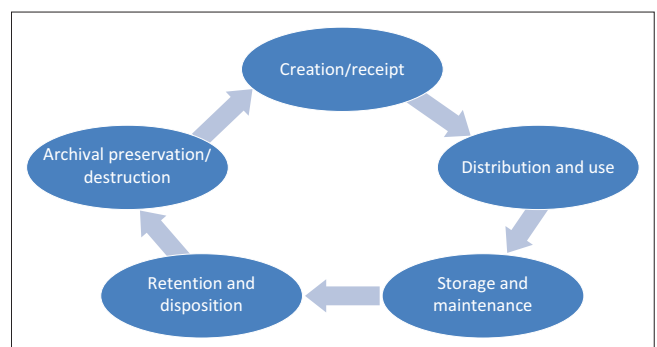
Records lifecycle

The lifecycle model shown in Figure 1 portrays a closed system that begins with the birth of a document (capture/creation) and ends with its death (destruction) or movement to an archive for permanent preservation. This model is useful when describing the management of paper-based records. To save storage space, retention schedules are developed to document the method of disposition and to establish destruction dates. Records that are no longer in active use but that have not yet met their retention requirements may be transferred to a records centre for storage and eventual destruction. Records that have permanent value are most often transferred to an archive for preservation and use.

According to Shepherd and Yeo (2003:05), the concept of the record life cycle indicates that records have a life like that of living organisms because they are born when they are created, live during their usage and then die when they are destroyed if they do not have continuing value. Shepherd and Yeo (2003:05) continue to show that most models of a record life cycle focus more on the different stages of a record life including its creation, capture, storage, use and disposal. Shepherd and Yeo (2003:05) posit that the life cycle concept of RM involves different stages in which records are said to be born and captured at the creation stage; followed by the use and maintenance stage as they are being used in an organisation that created and received them; and lastly in their disposition stage where they are either transferred to the archives of an organisation or destroyed. The records cycle is of significance as it outlines the approach and method to which RM should outgo in order to ensure proper management of organisational records.

Management of records in higher education institutions

Allahmagani and Bisi (2015:40) are of the view that institutions like universities create records while carrying out



Source: Tayfun, A.C., 1996, *A model for life cycle Records Management*, TRW Environmental Safety Systems, Inc., WA, Lyndhurst, Ohio, p. 15

FIGURE 1: Records and information lifecycle model.

their daily business activities. Therefore, records that are generated include among others those of students, staff, departments, faculty boards, council and senate. Akor and Udensi (2013:88) explain that 'decision-making in the university system is an administrative function and invariably requires information in the form of records'. Decision-making is a task involving various hierarchical ranks in the university and they all need records to achieve it. Therefore, information that is needed for acting by university officials is contained in the institution's documents as records. It is for this reason that records must always be easy to find for decision-makers. On the other hand, decision-makers should also be aware of the availability of records to refer in their decision-making process. Seniwoliba et al. (2017) after conducting research at the University for Development Studies in Ghana, observed that:

[R]ecords Management procedures are considered an indispensable tool for enhancing service delivery since records were required for decision-making and that without these tools it is not possible to plan and make sound decisions. (n.p.)

Reliable and impartial delivery of services during the conduct of business relies on best RM procedures. In the same way, Seniwoliba et al. (2017) state that for an organisation to maintain accountability and effective control over its actions, its RM procedures need to provide a vivid guiding tool for the management of institutional records. In addition to that, Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005) also believe that a lack of proper RM procedures will negatively impact the university's efficiency and accountability in its activities and actions. Iwhiwhu (2005:347) asserts that while the basic aim and mission of any tertiary institute are to deliver high-quality teaching, research and services, attention is also necessary for the function of the RM programme. Higher Education Institutions need to ensure that records created in their daily activities tally with the functions of administration and educational research of the institution. Phiri (2016:04) states that a university needs to practice proper Records Management in all its departments and faculties in order to fulfill requirements by the laws and regulations meant to guide its operations. For example, enactment of laws guiding the rights of access to information means that university records are very important. Phiri (2016:04) further maintains that best practices in the university records keeping processes and procedures have to be consistent throughout the university departments and faculties. This can be guaranteed when the institution focusses on the proper management of its records to fully support both internal and external research activities.

International Organization for Standardization's Records Management standard

The ISO 15489 standards of RM are created and developed to establish the core main concepts and principles for creating, capturing and managing records. This standard sits at the heart of many other international organisation for standardisation and technical reports that provide

more guidance and instructions on the various concepts, practices and techniques relevant to creating, capturing and managing recapturing (ISO 15489-1:2016, 2016:V).

Sheppard and Yeo (2003:26) state that there are numerous published standards of interest to those responsible for developing and operating RM programmes and systems. They mention the International Organization for Standardization's ISO 15489 on Records Management which was published by the International Organization for Standardization. They also mention the Australian National Standard AS 4390-1996 Records Management which they state, 'provides benchmarks against which RM programmes and systems can be measured'. However, the ISO standards are universally agreed upon by practices and procedures where commonwealth countries have their input in their development. To emphasise, Joseph, Debowski and Goldschmidt (2012:58) also show that the ISO 15489 on Records Management have been widely accepted as an influential and critical set of principles and guidelines that ensure RM systems are relevant for purpose.

International Organization for Standardization 15489 principles and practices

Higher Education Institutions that align their creation of records along the lines of the ISO 15489 standards can perform their business functions smoothly as they can prove that these functions conform to their vision, mission, core values and policy statements. Table 1 outlines the principles and benefits of ISO 15489. These principles are significant as they help in guiding organisations in order to effectively and efficiently manage their records.

TABLE 1: International Organization for Standardization 15489 principles and benefits of ISO 15489.

Principles of ISO 15489	Benefits of ISO 15489
1) The creation, capture and management of records are integral parts of conducting business, in any context	1) Improved transparency and accountability; effective policy formation and informed decision-making
2) Records, regardless of form or structure, are authoritative evidence of business when they possess the characteristics of authenticity, reliability, integrity and useability	2) Management of business risks; continuity in the event of a disaster; the protection of rights and obligations of organisations and individuals
3) Records consist of content and metadata, which describe the context, content and structure of the records, as well as their management through time	3) Protection and support in litigation; compliance with legislation and regulations; improved ability to demonstrate corporate responsibility, including meeting sustainability goals
4) Decisions regarding the creation, capture and management of records are based on the analysis and risk assessment of business activities, in their business, legal, regulatory and societal contexts	4) Reduction of costs through greater business efficiency; protection of intellectual property; evidence-based research and development activities
5) Systems for managing records, regardless of their degree of automation, enable the application of records controls and the execution of processes for creating, capturing and managing records. They depend on defined policies, responsibilities, monitoring and evaluation, and training in order to meet identified records requirements	5) The formation of business, personal and cultural identity; the protection of corporate, personal and collective memory

Source: Adopted from International Organisation for Standardisation's (ISO), 2016, *ISO 15489-2: 'Information and documentation – Records Management. Part 1: Concepts and principles*, viewed 04 March 2025, from <https://www.iso.org/standard/62542.html>

Problem statement, aim and objectives of the study

It has been observed that RM in many African countries is facing several problems including non-alignment with standards and legislative requirements. The researcher has also observed that there is a problem with the collapsed RM programme at the NUL. According to Seles (2016:162), African public record-keeping has worsened since the end of the colonial era, with the collapse of the colonial registry systems. Seles (2016:162) further notes that when the colonial era ended and African countries regained their freedom and independence from Britain and other colonial powers, new government structures were developed. This affected RM, as records were no longer considered valuable resources that needed to be properly managed.

This study focussed on establishing the extent to which the current NUL RM practices aligned with the ISO 15489 standard on Records Management. This study also aimed to establish ways in which NUL can improve its RM practices by implementing the principles, practices and processes that are recommended by the ISO. The objectives of the study were:

- To investigate NUL's RM processes to see if they are aligned with that of ISO 15489.
- To identify types, categories and classes of records that the NUL creates and receives during their daily activities.
- To determine the problem areas hindering proper management of the records at NUL and then provide recommendations for improvement.
- To establish whether there is any alignment between the NUL RM practices and that of the ISO 15489 standards on Record Management.
- To recommend practices that can help the NUL to improve their RM practices.

Research methods and design

This section outlines the research methodological approach applied in this study. It will discuss the selected philosophical paradigm, the research approach, the research strategy and the sampling techniques. In addition, it will cover the data collection technique used and the data analysis technique employed.

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009:110), the interpretivist paradigm is the philosophical position which is concerned with the way humans understand the world around them. The suitable underpinning philosophy for this study was found to be Interpretivism. The concern in this study was to evaluate the alignment of NUL's RM practices to that of the ISO 15489 standards. The NUL is the main university in Lesotho and is located Southeast of Maseru, it is regarded as one of the oldest universities in Africa having been established in 1945. A qualitative research method using a process evaluation research strategy was also adopted. Stuart, Maynard and Rouncefield (2017:05) state that 'process

evaluations focus on how well a programme is operating'. In this case, the programme focussed on the RM practices at NUL. This strategy was deemed suitable because it allowed the researcher to evaluate and compare the RM practices at the NUL to the guidelines of the ISO 15489 standard on Records Management. A purposive sampling technique was chosen for this research, and the total number of targeted respondents was 52 and only 50 were interviewed. They are spread out around the university as shown in Table 2.

The sample for this research consisted of secretaries, assistant registrars, assistant administrators and personal assistants from various departments and faculties of the University. Data were collected through interviews using a predesigned interview schedule. The data were analysed using descriptive content analysis based on two thematic areas of the study: the current RM practices at NUL and the challenges staff face in adhering to ISO 15489 on Records Management. These themes were derived from the study's objectives (Figure 2).

Semi-structured interviews were applied to collect data from the targeted population which included senior administrators, assistant administrators, assistant registrars, secretaries and personal assistants. The semi-structured interview contained standardised and open questions. The interviews were audio recorded for the purpose of retaining complete and continuous audio of all words spoken. According to Kumar (2011:n.p.) "The research problem as well as data collection strategies are reformulated as necessary throughout data collection either to acquire the 'totality' of a phenomenon or to select certain aspects for greater in-depth study". Clarke (2011:08) asserts

TABLE 2: Study population.

Senior assistant registrar	Assistant registrar	Assistant administrator	Secretaries	Personal assistant	Total
5	8	5	26	8	52

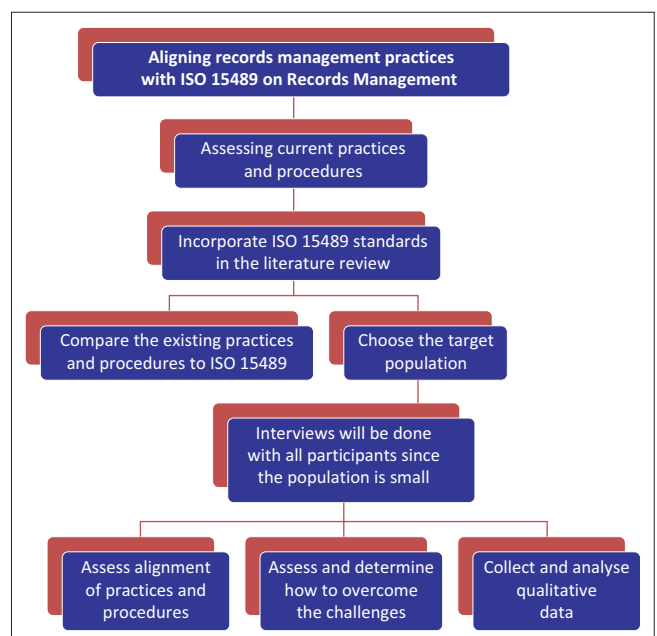


FIGURE 2: Research process map.

that interviewing is another research method widely used by evaluators. Neumann (2014:477) asserts that 'data analysis means a search for patterns in data recurrent behaviours, objects, phases, or ideas'. The data analysis for this study was conducted by analysing qualitative data from the interviews.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the College of Business and Economics Research Ethics Committee (CBEREC), University of Johannesburg, with an ethical clearance number 2020SCiS60. An official permission letter from the National University of Lesotho was received to conduct the research.

Results and discussion

This section will discuss the results and findings from the data collected and the analysis. The discussion is based on the study objective to establish the extent to which the current NUL Records Management practice is aligned with the ISO 15489. The study further aimed to establish ways in the NUL can improve its Records Management practices by implementing the principles and practices as recommended by the ISO 15489.

Based on research done by Seniwoliba (2017:31), aligning RM practices with ISO 15489 standards can ensure that NUL records:

- Provide support in decision-making.
- Facilitate efficient service provision and appropriate policy development.
- Enhance business undertaking and functions.
- Achieve effective and speedy retrieval of information about past activities.
- Enhance the delivery of services.
- Ensure conformity to policies and laws.
- Enable effective use of resources like space.

This research provided significant insights on the current records management practices at NUL, specifically the methods employed when handling the institutional sensitive records. The study revealed that NUL's records management practices is not align to the ISO standards and this based on the findings from the interviewees listed in the methodology section.

Records Management training and positions in the National University of Lesotho

The implementation of a RM programme in any organisation includes highly technical processes such as classification, preparing disposition authorities and systems design. These processes can be performed properly by professionally trained personnel. For instance, acquiring an electronic system obviously needs relevant technical skills and specialised training to be installed and operated effectively (ISO 15489 2016:62). Based on the findings it is revealed that in the NUL structure, there are no RM positions. The National University of Lesotho depends on personnel who are

employed as secretaries, assistant registrars, assistant administrators, personal secretaries or assistants and executive officers for the management of records. This is also not aligned with the ISO 15489 standard on RM. The participants showed that in these secretarial courses, there is a topic called 'office procedures' or 'secretarial duties' which they think is related to RM. In their own words, they explained their training as follows:

'Yes as a secretary I have done office practice, and it entails filing which is related to Records Management.' (Participant 2, Female, Secretary)

'Yes in the secretarial duties we have Records Management. For example, filing.' (Participant 6, Female, Secretary)

'Yes Secretarial studies include filing.' (Participant 7, Female, Secretary)

'Yes under Diploma in secretary as a programme, there is office procedure, and it equips us with records-keeping.' (Participant 8, Female, Secretary)

'Partially on secretarial duties.' (Participant 9, Male, Secretary)

'Yes on secretarial duties there is a course on Records Management.' (Participant 13, Female, Secretary)

'Yes, I did management in IDM, Diploma in Business Administration.' (Participant 26, Female, Assistant administrator)

'Office procedure and management.' (Participant 47, Female, Secretary)

These responses are examples of many of the participants as most of them mentioned similar qualifications to the ones mentioned. Other participants replied 'No' and they were not asked to elaborate further hence their responses were as brief as that. Therefore, this study indicates that many of the responsibilities to ensure proper running of all activities and processes of RM in NUL are assigned to non-professionals. This suggests that proper Records Management is not conducted and performed effectively due the limited training provided to the Records Management practitioners with the NUL. This is a clear indication that NUL is not aligned with ISO 15489 by employing qualified and well trained Records Management practitioners.

International Organization for Standardization 15489 recommends methods of RM training that an organisation can utilise. These are some of the methods:

- Classroom training for employees new to responsibilities or at times of system change
- On-the-job training and coaching provided as part of a formal programme or informally by knowledgeable supervisors or peers
- Briefing sessions and seminars on specific record issues or initiatives
- Leaflets and booklets providing short 'how-to' guides describing aspects of the organisation's record policies or practices
- Training courses provided by educational institutions or professional organisations that may be part of the general offerings of these institutions or may be

developed on request to meet the organisation's particular needs

Format of records created at the National University of Lesotho

This study revealed that all records created by the NUL faculties and departments can be in either paper or electronic format. Results of this study show that almost all faculties and departments create or receive some form of record (e.g., emails, memos and letters) either from internal departments or from outside the organisation. Responses from this study also indicate that the NUL records are kept/stored in desktop computers (electronic) and in cabinets and shelves (paper files). In their exact words, the majority of respondents are hereby quoted verbatim:

'We have physical records being files kept in filing cabinets and shelves. We also have records in desktop computers, laptops and flash discs.' (Participant 1, Male, Assistant registrar)

'We have electronic and paper but we are still using more paper records than electronic.' (Participant 2, Female, Secretary)

'We have paper records, spreadsheets, PDF, and Microsoft word records; we also have physical records being files kept in filing cabinets and shelves.' (Participant 4, Female, Personal assistant)

'There are records in my desktop computer, my laptop and some are stored in the flash disc.' (Participant 9, Male, Secretary)

'We have physical records which are files or records kept in filing cabinets and/shelves. Then we have soft copies/records which are records kept either on or in the desktops, laptops and flash discs.' (Participant 27, Female, Personal assistant)

Based on the responses gathered in this study, all the respondents interviewed in this study have at least one computer within which electronic records are stored. They also have their physical storage facilities being shelves and cabinets. This means in terms of storage equipment, the NUL can be able to manage electronic records to a certain extent. Still, the management of records being electronic or paper-based at NUL will need more than just a computer and filing cabinets. The National University of Lesotho will need personnel with relevant skills and understanding of the operations of a RM system to ensure the proper implementation of the overall RM programme.

Classification systems, filing systems and indexes in the National University of Lesotho

A classification system should be designed in a way that ensures support for the RM processes. The NUL classification system should reflect the functions of NUL and be based on an analysis of the NUL functions. Results of the study reveal that records that are created and received in NUL are classified using both numerical order and alphabetical order. However, the results also show that the majority of the NUL records-keeping staff design their own classification systems. Therefore, this means the classification systems cannot be the reflection of NUL functions. It is also evident from these results that NUL classification systems created by individual

offices are not in line with their business functions. The absence of a properly designed records classification system for NUL also means unavailability of the thesaurus; titling and indexing rules; identification of records disposition classes and access classifications.

As the results indicate that the majority of record-keeping staff in NUL do not have a classification system that is based on the guidelines, the implication is that NUL does not organise, describe and link or share records, either internally or externally, and that means there is a lack of improved access, retrieval, use and dissemination of its records. The results also show that most of the RM practices in NUL are not supported by instruments such as vocabulary controls and classification systems to promote consistency of titling and description to facilitate retrieval and use. A classification system properly designed can be used to support a variety of RM processes in addition to facilitating access and use, for example, storage and protection, and retention and disposition. However, the results of this study show that this happens at a very minimal frequency in NUL. According to the results, only a few respondents said that they use classification schemes and indexes in their offices. These assertions are based on the responses received during interviews such as the following:

'I classify records as they arrive, and I use that classification to store them and to retrieve the needed ones.' (Participant 2, Female, Secretary)

'I keep records in my own numerical order and also alphabetically and most records are manually kept.' (Participant 4, Female, Personal assistant)

'Some files are in my computer while some are in our cabinets and shelves. We label them by their original office, for example mail from vice chancellor will be in file labelled VC.' (Participant 5, Female, Secretary)

'In the case of soft copies, which I have on my desktop and laptop, it is easy to find and retrieve when needed.' (Participant 11, Female, Secretary)

'Files in the file rooms are retrieved by our secretaries as they will be able to trace or keep a record of who took a file and when.' (Participant 17, Female, Secretary)

'The files are arranged by date of opening and closing, and also the name of originating office.' (Participant 28, Female, Secretary)

'They are arranged by their order of subject and date.' (Participant 6, Female, Secretary)

'We apply our numerical order and alphabetical order.' (Participant 34, Female, Secretary)

'By using dates, folio or references.' (Participant 9, Male, Secretary)

'We depend on the alphabetical order.' (Participant 14, Female, Secretary)

An interviewee also explained that even though she does not apply or utilise the NUL filing system, classification or indexing of files and documents, she is aware that there is such a system in NUL because in the past when she started working in NUL, the filing that was carried out was orderly and there

were references in all mail that they used to handle. She continued:

'I can't remember how we ended up not following the old and professional ways that we used when I first came in NUL as a young secretary.' (Participant 42, Female, Secretary)

Another respondent who also affirms the existence and use of an index for filing and retrieval of documents explained as follows:

'We use index to help us easily access records. Files on the computer are also easily accessed.' (Participant 18, Female, Secretary)

These statements show that records are given some order through the index. The same responses also imply that even those electronic records that are referred to as files on the computer are said to be easily accessible. This study has established that NUL could use a file plan or classification scheme to provide a means of knowing what records exist and where they are kept. Few respondents indicated that they refer to the index when creating their correspondence while many of the respondents did not even mention the index or classification scheme in their responses. Therefore, results imply that record-keeping personnel in NUL do not use index or file systems and this means their records are filed without any kind of reference numbers. This also means records can easily be dislocated. It can also be noted that records that are created without reference numbers and that are not created based on filing systems are easily exposed to illegal destruction.

Factors hindering alignment of Records Management practices with International Organization for Standardization 15489 standard provisions in National University of Lesotho

Adoption and utilisation of a RM programme in any organisation include 'highly technical processes such as: classification, preparing disposition authorities and systems design' (ISO 15489 2016:62). Professionally trained personnel can properly do these processes. For instance, acquiring an electronic system obviously needs relevant technical skills and specialised training to be installed and operated effectively (ISO 15489 2016:62). The above premise portrays that the NUL does not fully conform to the recommendations of properly skilled staff as stated in the ISO 15489 RM standard. This is evident as indicated within responses received from the respondents as most of their responses indicate that they are not professionally trained in RM. According to the findings, NUL does not have positions for records managers or RM professionals.

The NUL depends on personnel who are employed as secretaries, assistant registrars, assistant administrators, personal secretaries/assistants and executive officers for the management of their records. Table 3 outlines the comparison of ISO recommendations with the current RM practice in NUL.

TABLE 3: Comparison of the International Organization for Standardization recommendations and current **record management** practices at the National University of Lesotho.

ISO 15489 2016 standards	RM process of NUL	Aligned or not aligned
Creating records	No guidelines or not known by records-keeping staff	Not aligned
Capturing records	No standard procedures	Not aligned
Classification and indexing	Majority of records-keeping staff use their own indexes and Classification is available but is not used in majority of the offices	Not aligned on indexing and partly aligned on classification
Access control	Majority of records-keeping staff use their own methods	Not aligned
Storing records	The majority use shelves and cabinets and their own designed handling methods	Not aligned
Use and reuse	There is no system or standard approach to the use and reuse of records	Not aligned
Migration or conversation	Majority of records-keeping staff use their own designs and majority use non-standard methods	Not aligned
Disposition	No disposition guidelines therefore all departments use their own methods	Not aligned

NUL, National University of Lesotho; RM, Records Management.

Table 3 derived from the findings shows that the NUL RM practices are not aligned to the ISO recommendations for RM, and this is the major finding for this research. Furthermore, the participants showed that in these secretarial courses, there is a topic called 'office procedures' or 'secretarial duties' which they think is related to RM. In their own words, they explained their training as follows:

'Yes, as a secretary I have done office practice, and it entails filing which is related to Records Management.' (Participant 5, Female, Secretary)

'Yes, in the secretarial duties we have Records Management. For example, filing.' (Participant 6, Female, Secretary)

'Yes, Secretarial studies include filing.' (Participant 7, Female, Secretary)

'Yes, under Diploma in secretary as a programme, there is office procedure, and it equips us with records-keeping.' (Participant 8, Female, Secretary)

'Partially on secretarial duties.' (Participant 9, Male, Secretary)

'Yes, on secretarial duties there is a course on Records Management.' (Participant 10, Female, Secretary)

It is therefore significant to note that most secretaries are partly trained or introduced to the concept of RM in their qualifications.

Challenges encountered in the management of records at the National University of Lesotho

Records-keeping staff in NUL encounter challenges like other RM professionals in their daily work. The results of this study indicate that NUL records-keeping staff also encounter various types of challenges in their daily work. Organisations should define and document a policy for RM. The objective of the policy should be the creation and management of authentic, reliable and usable records, capable of supporting business functions and activities for as long as they are required. Organisations should ensure that the policy is

communicated and implemented at all levels in the organisation (ISO 15489 2016:15). For instance, 'organisational record management policy should spell out what a record is as it applies to its operations'.

However, results of this research show that in NUL record-keeping staff do not have a working definition because there are no guidelines or policies that facilitate new record creation. Therefore, this has become an existing problem as related by some of the respondents in the preceding statements. In the same manner, respondents also mentioned various challenges pertaining to NUL RM practices. Poor management of NUL records results in constant misplacement that often leads to loss of valuable evidence. This happens in NUL as reported by respondents in this study:

'Misfiling, delay in filing, and misplacing of files.' (Participant 14, Female, Secretary)

'People (action officers or decision-makers) do not return documents after use and misplace them in their offices.' (Participant 15, Female, Secretary)

'Most department members (action officers and decision-makers) are not able to maintain records.' (Participant 16, Female, Secretary)

'Space provided for filing is too small and there is no confidentiality as some information needs to be kept secret.' (Participant 17, Female, Secretary)

'There is no central store for keeping records and as the result everyone has access.' (Participant 18, Female, Secretary)

According to the results of the interviews in this study, NUL also encounters problems with documents that are weeded from the files without authority. This is gathered from the statements made by some of the respondents as they state:

'There are no guidelines or regulations stating who is responsible to destroy or archive old documents. The old practices that were used have no support to fall back on.' (Participant 20, Female, Secretary)

Recommendations for improvements in Records Management within the National University of Lesotho

This research has also established how the NUL can improve its RM practices by aligning it to ISO 15489. According to the responses to the study's questions, the records-keeping staff are not aware of the best practices recommended by standards on RM. They are not aware of the existence or non-existence of any policy, guidelines or regulations on RM. They are also not aware of the availability of the file classification system at the NUL. Results also portray that NUL must manage records emanating from the daily operations and activities such as minutes of faculty boards and departments' committees, council papers, senate papers, personnel records, examination results, students' applications and admissions, administrative correspondences, reports of university officers, accreditation documents and sponsorship records.

Many of the personnel involved in the management of the NUL records encounter problems of misfiling, difficult and slow retrieval of records; missing or lost files and documents; and failure to return documents by action officers. The other respondent infers that sometimes it is difficult to find the documents needed, especially those which are old. The other one explained that the space provided for filing is too small and that there is no confidentiality, as some information needs to be kept secret. Another challenge facing the records-keeping staff of the NUL as pointed out in the interviews has been the documents that are sometimes found torn because of mishandling filing which results in inconvenience to the decision-makers.

'there should be central storage for all the records or registry should be reopened in order to keep records safely.' (Participant 40, Female, Assistant registrar)

'NUL used to have a registry for keeping records and I recommend that it would be proper to have it again.' (Participant 41, Female, Secretary)

'raised concern on the skills of the records-keeping staff: "They need to be improved, and staff be trained".' (Participant 42, Female, Secretary)

'Manual filing is still effective but electronic filing would save us a lot of time. Therefore, I would recommend that NUL move to electronic.' (Participant 43, Female, Secretary)

'More training to us and guidance on how to file and on finding records.' (Participant 44, Female, Secretary)

The findings of this study indicated that the management of NUL records was neither effective nor efficient. Many respondents observed that there was a lack of proper training in RM for record-keeping staff. Respondents also expressed their concern regarding the absence of a registry. A central registry would be appropriate in enhancing the security of records. Another concern is pointed out at the manual filing system, which they think is still effective, but they recommended that electronic filing would be more appropriate as it would improve access and retrieval of records, saving a lot of time. Respondents also recommended that guidelines on filing should be made available as well as proper finding aid.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study investigated the alignment of the NUL RM practices with the ISO 15489 standards on record management. The participants in this study were chosen with the understanding that they were the most suitable for providing the needed insights on the management of records of NUL. Participants were to provide information regarding their current RM practices at NUL. Their responses were regarded to be the most relevant as the NUL depended on them for all the RM activities. The information provided by the sampled participants was significant in the evaluation of the alignment of the current RM practices of the NUL to that of the ISO 15489 standard recommendations. The information provided by the participants in this research will also be helpful in

aiding the upgrading of the records-keeping practices of the NUL because it comes from the inside of the institution. In conclusion, the author recommends further research to be conducted with specific RM offices in the public sector and their alignment with ISO 15489.

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T.A.T., P.T.L. and S.K. contributed equally to this article. T.A.T. was a Masters of Philosophy student, supervised by S.K. and co-supervised by P.T.L.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, S.K., upon reasonable request.

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