

Managing Heritage: A Study of Archival Collections Handling Practices at Botswana National Archives and Records Services

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Abstract

Archival institutions worldwide face the challenge of collection deterioration through the handling and use of archives, inadequate or lack of records management standards and non-compliance with archival legislations. This study aimed at assessing the handling practices and use of archival collections in Botswana. The study adopted the pragmatist paradigm and consequently used questionnaires, interviews, and observations to collect data. The study sample consisted of sixteen (16) Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS) staff purposively selected for interview and 297 BNARS users randomly selected to complete the questionnaire. The findings revealed that, although the staff of the surveyed institution demonstrated reasonable commitment to collection care or preservation of archives, and BNARS does not consistently respond to proper collection care and compliance programme.

Furthermore, the study revealed that inappropriate handling and use of archives practices, lack of training in preservation, inadequate supervision of the study area, and failure to enforce compliance to archives legislations contribute to archives collection deterioration. The study recommended that the development of guidelines on good handling practices, preservation policy, handling manual, compliance programme, among others.

Keywords: Archives; Archival Collections; Archival Use; Handling Practices.

Introduction

Archival institutions, the world over, strive to ensure that continued access to records is balanced with safe handling. However, balancing access to records and preservation at the same time is usually an uneasy task to achieve as these two functions run simultaneously and are equally important. Consequently, archival institutions lose records of enduring value even before their due time for poor handling procedures, and hence, struggle to provide the much-needed access to certain records. According to Winsor (2002), Sullivan (2011) and Fahey (2016), archival institutions worldwide are at a risk of losing valuable collections due to handling, use of collection and non-compliance of archives to archival legislations. Considering this phenomenon, the African continent is not spared of the problem as shown by studies by Ngulube (2003); Qobo (2004); Oweru and Mnjama (2014); and Hase (2016); These studies show that archival collections in the Eastern and Southern African Regional Branch for

International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) region are in danger of being destroyed because of handling and use of the collections.

The responsibility of archival institutions is to ensure compliance with handling and use of collection practices in their endeavor to provide access to archival collections. Handling and use of collection practices refer to the processes of monitoring, controlling, handling and moving procedures, search room practices, exhibitions, lending, and object display with the aim to minimising archival collection deterioration (Winsor, 2002). Failure to carefully monitor and control how documents are handled and used results in the deterioration of archival collection even as some collection may be damaged beyond reconstruction (Winsor, 2002; Ngulube, 2003). Archives' materials are in danger of extinction if heritage institutions fail to care for them through appropriate handling and use of documents practices. When archives are lost, they cannot be replaced or brought back to life, and any loss of archives marks its extinction (Albada, 1996; Fahey, 2016). In solving these challenges, the fundamental strategy in handling and using collection deliberation are monitoring, controlling, evaluation and enforcement of handling practices, and search room practices (Winsor, 2002).

Failure to protect collection against damage caused by handling practice and use of collection and non-compliance with archives legislations may lead to wear, tear, loss of image, and staining (Fahey, 2016; and Standards Australia Committee QR-014, 2006). Careful handling and use of collection are essential elements of collection care that have the potential to increase the level of access to collections and ensure the sustainable use of cultural heritage materials (Winsor, 2002; The National Park Service Conserve Ogram, 1996). Equally, Adcock (n.d.) concurs that proper handling of archival collection helps to ensure their preservation for future researchers. According to Augusto (2017) archival legislation is "a crucial tool for the public sector to ensure the management, preservation and access of a country's national documentary heritage". Protection of archival collection is guaranteed through strict enforcement of laws, regulations, policies, and procedures (Roper and Millar, 1999).

In the same vein, failure to enforce compliance with archives regulations and search room rules

makes the law ineffective in the protection of archival materials (Yuba, 2013). Inappropriate handling practices effectively contribute to information materials deterioration due to manipulation by human beings. For example, "rough handling, deliberate abuse, folding the fore-edges of pages as a mark of reading, underlining, and highlighting" are detrimental to the longevity of archival materials (Nishanthi, 2020; Sahoo, 2004). Handling practices are performed to facilitate the use of archival materials by staff and users. In the process of usage, the collection experiences wear and tear, staining, creases, and loss of image, hence, damage to the collection (Fahey, 2016). Handling practices and use of archival collection are interdependent, as handling practice aids the process of use, while use is made possible through handling. The interplay between handling and use results in the deterioration of collection. In this case, collection is the object, while handling practices and use of collection are factors of deterioration.

McCann (2013) agrees that "access and preservation in archives are mutually dependent - without one, the other cannot be sustained." Archival institutions all over the world are confronted with many challenges of non-compliance with the rules and regulations governing access to archives and improper handling and use of collection. These persevering and persisting gaps in collection care are also not an exemption in Botswana. Handling and use of collection have been discovered as serious causes of archival materials deterioration (Seabo 1995; Siele 2012; Kootshabe and Mnjama, 2014). Furthermore, the extant literature shows that out of the nine (9) broad areas, comprising policy buildings, storage, housekeeping, handling and use of collections, environmental monitoring and control, conservation, surrogate copies and new media, and emergency preparedness of the collection care for museums, archives and library framework, only two have been investigated in Botswana and these are environmental monitoring and control (Segaetsho and Mnjama, 2017) and emergency preparedness (Hlabangaan, 2006). Handling practices and use of collections in Botswana are one of the significant areas that have escaped the scrutiny of researchers in Botswana. This study is therefore an effort to bridge the gap.

Background Information of Botswana National Archives and Records Services

The Botswana National Archives (BNA), now referred to as Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS), was established in 1967 as a unit under the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs (Mosweu and Simon 2018). Botswana Parliament enacted the National Archives Act in 1978, which officially established the BNA as an institution in charge of preservation of public archives and provision of access to archives (Government of Botswana 2017). In 1985, BNA was merged with National Public Records Services to become Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS) in order to promote and enhance efficiency and effectiveness in archives and records management in Botswana (Kootshabe and Mnajama, 2014). The permanent secretary to the President issued out circular No.4 of 1992 to mark the official merger (Government of Botswana 2017). BNARS is currently under the Ministry of Youth, Gender, Sport and Culture Development established in 2007 (Government of Botswana 2017). BNARS is made up of two main professional divisions, namely; records management division, and archives administration division (Government of Botswana 2017). BNARS is an information centre located in Gaborone (Capital City), Botswana and it is headed by a director. The information centre has three regional records centres situated in Gaborone City, Kanye village and the City of Francistown headed by principal records managers. The main function of the centres is to provide low cost and high density storage area for semi-current records for all government institutions and make them accessible to the creating agencies. The principal records manager in-charge each branch ensures the provision of records and information management service to the public offices based in the districts.

The archives administration division was established in 1967 to provide reference services to mostly public servants and the public (Thompson 1970). In the formative years, search room operations were carried out in carports converted into reading room and in 1982, BNARS moved into a purpose built archives building that contains a purpose built search room unit (Government of Botswana, 2017). BNARS archives repository

houses paper records which are predominantly colonial official collections (e.g., high commissioner, resident commissioner, divisional commissioner, and secretariat), post-independence archives (e.g. from Botswana government ministries and departments and local governments). Furthermore, private archives collections are deposited by various donors including individual persons and private institutions (Ramokate 2006). The public and private archives collections are subject to different access restrictions as per the BNARS Act of 1978. BNARS repositories house materials that include monographs, microfiche, microfilms, serials, newspapers, films, audio recordings, maps, videotapes, DVD, letters, diaries, account books, photographs, documents, slides, posters, leaflets/brochures and many of them are paper-based documents such as files (Ramokate 2006).

Statement of the Problem

The deterioration of archival materials through the handling and use of collection and non-compliance to handling rules, access policies, search room rules and archives regulations has been established in the literature as a worldwide phenomenon (Shameenda 2011; Fahey 2016; and Hase 2016.). In Botswana, over-use, and handling of archives cause damage to archives (Seabo, 1995; Siele 2012; Phologolo, 2015; and Mosweu 2021). A study done by Oweru (2014) in Tanzania concluded that the search room rules governing access to information materials are violated as some of the users enter the study area carrying water. This is contrary to the rules. In Botswana, it has been argued by Mnajama, (2019) that many archivists, records managers, and other information professionals working in Botswana are unaware of the legislative requirements under which their organisations are operating. This may include access standards for handling and use of collections. A preliminary investigation done in Botswana in the past seems to support the fact that the advocated solutions have not been put into practice. In this regards, this study assesses the handling practices and use of archival collections in Botswana.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to examine handling practices and use of archival collection at BNARS. Specifically, the study sought to:

- assess the handling and use of archival collection practices at BNARS,
- evaluate the reading room practices at BNARS,
- determine the level of compliance to the draft access policy, rules, and regulations at BNARS, and
- make appropriate recommendations that lengthen the lifespan of the archive materials in Botswana.

Literature Review

Many scholars in the Eastern and Southern African Regional Branch of International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) region, amongst them are Abankwah (2008), Oweru and Mnjama (2014), Kootshabe and Mnjama (2014), and Myo (2016) have established that frequent careless handling of archives materials is the most prevalent cause of archival collections deterioration regardless of their formats. Similarly, Albada (1996) noted that repeated poor handling archival materials can speedily change an archival document that is in good physical condition into an unusable item that needs expensive repair. Walker (2013); Oweru and Mnjama (2014), and Myo (2016) affirm that handling archival materials with dirty and oily hands damages documents in archival institutions worldwide. Human hands have natural oil, which is transferred to archival documents and leave long-lasting oily spots on them (Ngulube, 2003). From the onset, the oil deposited on the documents is not visible, but finger grease becomes pronounced as it oxidises and accumulates dirt which destroy the records (Ngulube, 2003). Murtagh (n.d.) consequently suggests that washing hands prior to handling records prevents the introduction of hands oil and dirt to archival material, hence, preventive preservation becomes necessary.

A study by Qobo (2004) showed that “users perform photocopying without any supervision due to shortage of staff.” The study further noted that researchers smuggle food items and drinks into the search room (Qobo, 2004). In Tanzania, the study by Oweru and Mnjama (2014) indicated that, the search room rules governing access to information materials are violated as some of the users enter the study area carrying water. This practice contrary

to these rules. In Botswana, a study by Moje and Modise (2007), portrayed the picture of a researcher using a pen in the reading room and its captioned “researcher in the reading room”. This implies the sloppy supervision of the search room and failure to enforce reading room rules by the members of staff. McCausland (2010) recommended that that strict supervision of the study area provide the physical protection of the archives collections, and, as such ensures long-term access to them by future generations. It was also recommended that archivists monitoring the search room should walk down the aisles between the tables regularly to deter the researchers from conducting illegal and unethical behaviour (Roper and Millar 1999). According to Ford (1991), supervision of the search room and enforcement of the rules governing access in the study area are functions of reference service staff. It is critical that researchers adhere to the rules as this will extend the life of archival materials (Ford, 1991).

Archival institutions in the Commonwealth countries have archives legislations that contain records management provisions, which include the provisions to establishing standards and developing procedures, and guidelines (Parer, 2000). The Botswana archival legislation has the same provision (Government of Botswana, 1978). However, these institutions have the challenge of non-compliance, which results in inadequate or lack of records management standards that supplement the Act (Parer, 2000; Dunlop, 2009; and Oweru and Mnjama, 2014). For example, BNARS is yet to establish code of ethics and professional guidelines and regulations for records management professionals in Botswana (Maakwe, 2020). Reading room operations in archival institutions in the ESARBICA region are not conducted as per search room rules and regulations (Qobo, 2004; Dunlop, 2009). Oweru and Mnjama (2014) indicated that in Tanzania, the search room rules governing access to information materials are violated as some of the users enter the study area with unwanted materials like water. This is contrary to the rules. This is because of the information professionals’ failure to enforce archives statutory instruments. Compliance failure may be due to lack of provisions in the archives law that makes compliance to guidelines mandatory. Parer (2000) asserts that “while standards can be

implemented administratively, it is necessary that they be underpinned by legislation to ensure their acceptance and compliance.” It is important that researchers or readers adhere to the reading room rules as this will prolong the life of archival collections (Ford, 1991).

Theoretical framework

This study adopts the Standards Australia Compliance Programme as theoretical a lens to examine handling practices and use of archival collection at BNARS. Standards Australia Committee established the Standards Australia Compliance Programme QR-014 2006 in Australia. The reason for using this standard is to show the essence of compliance programme, and how, if implemented, it will improve quality of archival handling and use of collection practices and care.

Methodology

This study adopted the pragmatism paradigm approach and used both qualitative and quantitative methods with the aim of increasing confidence in the findings. The study used survey design to collect data from BNARS. The population of the study was 51, comprising 71 staff members across the country and 440 registered researchers, who used the facility. This study used purposive sampling to collect qualitative data from sixteen identified staff members who were considered pertinent to the study as they administer archives and provide reference services to users. Sixteen of the seventy-one staff members interviewed at the BNARS headquarters comprised the director, deputy director, principal archivist, two archivists in the technical service unit and six archivists and five temporary staff working in the reading room. For researchers, a simple random sampling was used to issue questionnaire to 297 users or archives researchers. The survey sampling was particularly important as the participants frequently handled and used collections during research and were expected to comply with the reference rules and regulations of BNARS. The data supplied by the interviewees was recorded using a smart phone, and notes were also taken and transcribed. Furthermore, the observation technique

was also adopted in this study to collect data on the physical environment at BNARS and how it affected the deterioration and compliance with handling regulations of archival collections and the use of search room rules. The study used three types of coding methods, namely; preliminary organisation of raw data to make sense of it, interconnect and link groups of codes, and formulating the story through coding manually. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences V24 (SPSS) was used in the analysis of quantitative data. The study findings are presented in charts, tables, and pictures.

Findings and Discussions

This section presents the finding and discussions of the study according to the following themes: handling and use of archival collection practices, reading room practices and compliance with legislative and regulatory instruments at BNARS. In order to observe ethical considerations, participants were name coded.

Handling and Use of Archival Collection Practices

The first objective of the study was to assess the handling and use of archival collection practices. The first question sought to ask if the researchers in their search room practices had observed any deterioration resulting from the handling and use of documents by researchers. The findings showed the respondents concurred that there was deterioration of archival materials at BNARS. At least 72% (n=127) of the respondents agreed that they had seen deteriorated materials at BNARS. In support of this result, an interviewed respondent stated thus: *“I have seen many torn pages, especially of old handwritten letters, memos, notes etc.”* This, obviously, can be attributed to the continuous use and mishandling of materials.

It was also observed that some materials were indeed torn and deteriorated due to the handling and use of archival materials. Moreover, there was evidence of liquid being spilt on some documents, as shown in Figure 1, and some records were marked with pen. The continuous usage of archival materials will eventually lead to their damage.

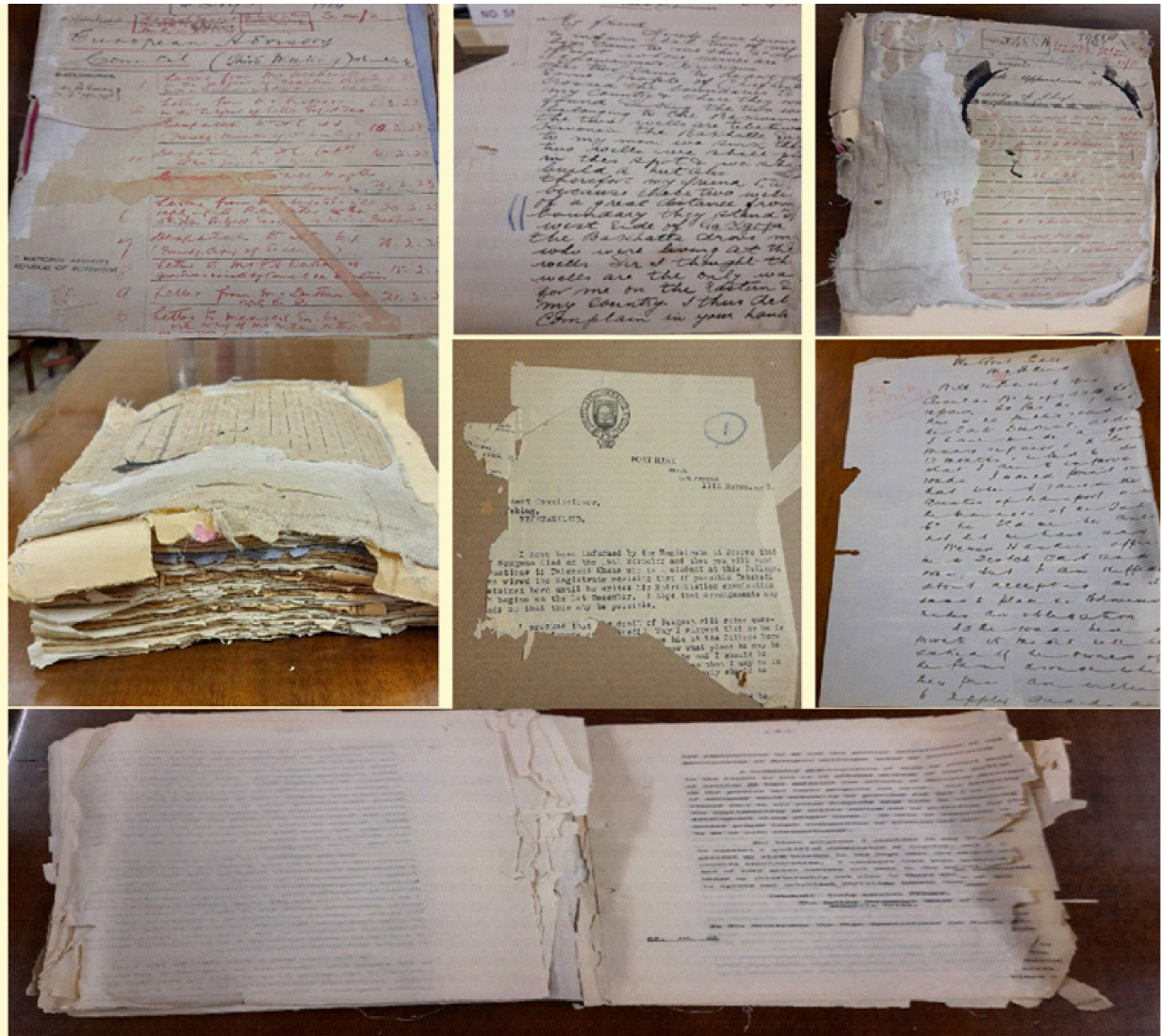


Figure 1: Condition of Some of the Archival Materials at BNARS

Source: Field data, 2021

Furthermore, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the fact that handling and use of collections cause damage to archival materials. Most (n=102, 59%) respondents concurred that inappropriate handling and use cause damage to archival materials. Specifically, 29% (n=50) agreed, while 30% (n=52) strongly disagreed with

this. In addition, 29% (50) of the respondents were not sure (neutral) of the impact of inappropriate handling and use of archival materials. On the negative side, as seen in the Figure 2, 10% (n=18) disagreed, while 2% (n=3) strongly disagreed with the statement.

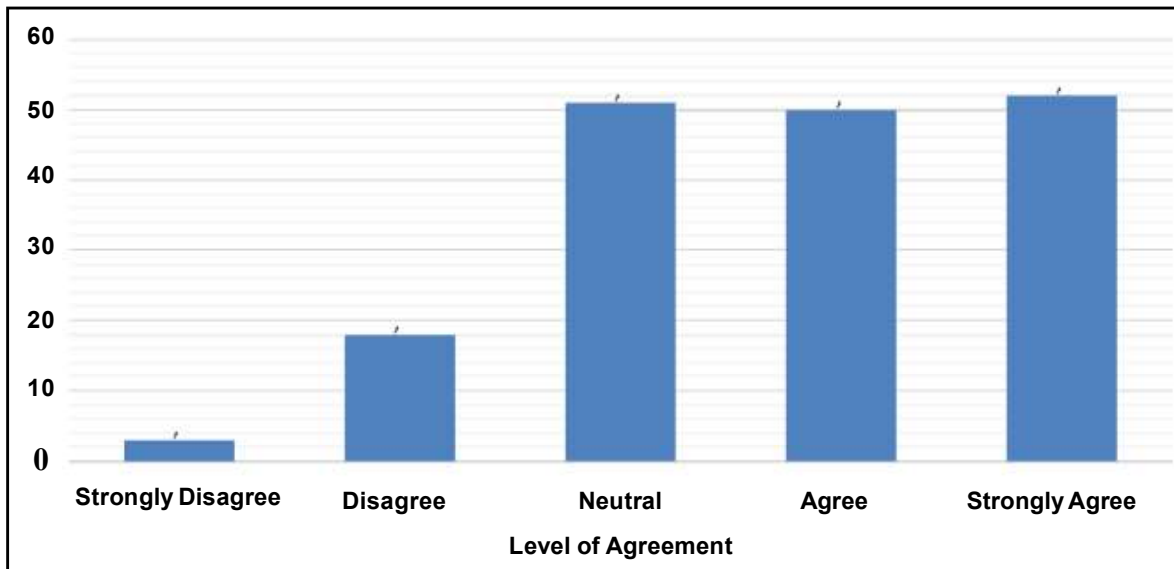


Figure 2: Handling and Use of Collection Causes Damage (n=1740).

Source: Field data 2021.

When asked to explain their choice of answer in Figure 2, the respondents, who agreed that handling and use cause damage to materials explained that it is obvious as some users (1) use saliva to flip pages, (2) fold pages of the books, (3) use pens or highlighters to mark what they want to read, and (4) handle the materials with dirty hands. Two respondents during the interview concurred that the frequent handling of archival materials, especially those in paper form, eventually damages the materials. One of them indicated that “*frequent usage of archival materials can have a devastating impact on them which calls for the production of copies to be made accessible for research use.*” Another respondent also claimed that: *The dropping of archival materials on the floor and use of highlighters or pens cause damage to archival materials. Also, if the material is highly used, for example audio visual materials, they can be damaged.*

The results revealed that majority of the respondents are of the view that handling and the use of archival materials by researchers cause damage to documents and, in some cases, destroy archival materials beyond reconstruction. In an interview, one of the archivists noted that *handling and use of collection cause harm to national documentary heritage through frequent retrieval,*

shelving, opening of documents and failure by archivists to maintain balance between use, storage, and handling. The data collected for this study suggested four factors that are responsible for the deterioration of archival materials: first, archives are damaged beyond repairs because even exceptionally brittle or damaged archival collections are issued to researchers instead of issuing surrogate copies. A previous study by Siele (2012) found out that BNARS staff issue out archival collections that are in poor physical conditions to the researchers. The use of surrogate copies instead of original archival collections that are in poor physical condition is an ideal handling and use of collection practices that protect collections against further deterioration (Winsor, 2002). Secondly, BNARS lacks handling rules and manuals to guide staff and researchers on careful handling of archival collections. Thirdly, the results also show that much of the damage sustained by archival collection is due to the handling and use of collections. This finding appears to be consistent with some previous studies. For instance, Fahey (2016) reported that the handling and use of archives are the most prevalent cause of archival materials deterioration. The same results were found by Siele (2012), who noted that the handling and use of collections contribute to documents deterioration. Fourthly, archives are

damaged through frequent retrieval, shelving, opening of documents and failure by archivists to maintain a balance between use, storage, and handling. It can be concluded that the handling and use of collections by researchers cause damage to archival materials at BNARS.

Reading/Search Room Practices at BNARS

The second objective of the study sought to establish the search room practices at BNARS. The questionnaire presented four closed ended questions that required the respondents to either agree (and say ‘yes’) or disagree (and say ‘no’).

Table 1 presents the findings of the four questions:

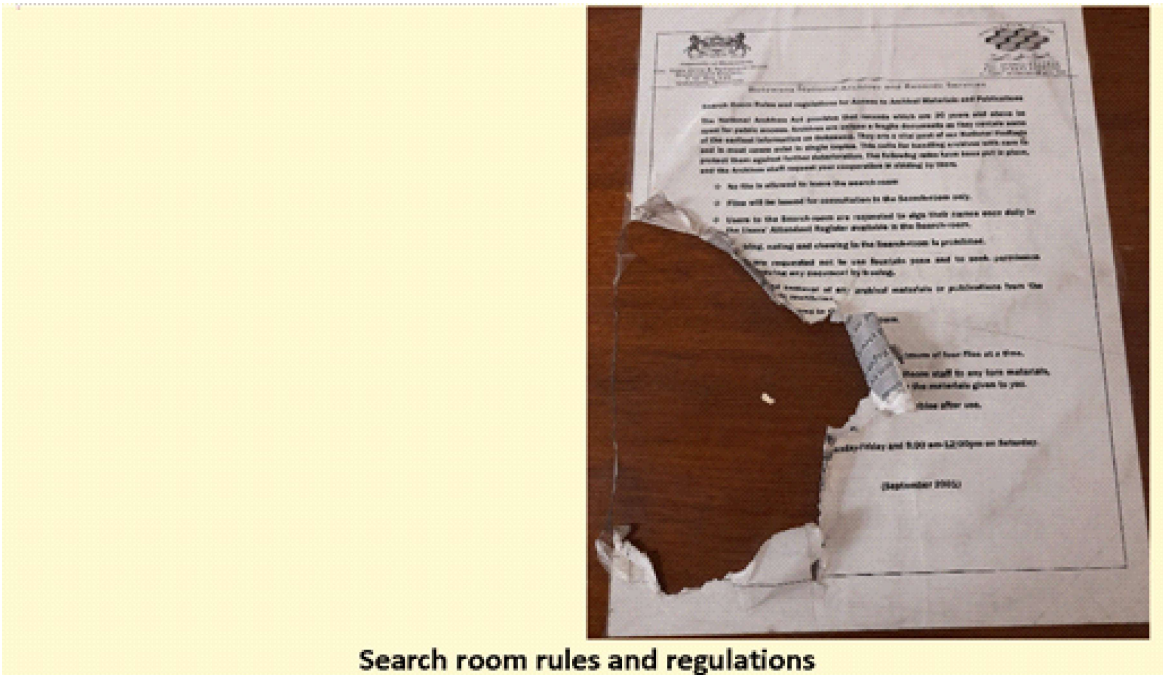
Table 1 Search Room Practices (n=177)

Series	Item	Yes		No	
		Frequ-ency	%	Frequ-ency	%
1	Are guidelines on good practice when handling collections displayed prominently in reading-rooms and study areas?	53	30%	124	70%
2	Is there a system in place for recording damage to collections reported by you as readers or researchers?	47	27%	128	73%
3	Have you ever been given written instructions on handling collections and reading-room practices?	77	44%	98	56%
4	Are work surfaces adequate sizes to support the material fully while it is in use?	46	26%	128	74%

Source: Field data 2021.

Item number one enquired if guidelines on good practice when handling collections are displayed prominently in reading-rooms and study areas. The results, as shown in Table 1, revealed a negative response from 70% (n=124) of the respondents, whereas only 30% (n=53) of the respondents agreed that the guidelines on good practice were displayed prominently in reading-rooms when collections are

handled. This finding corroborated with the observation made that the search room rules were not adequate as only three tables out of the 11 in the search room had the rules pasted on them. In addition, it was also noticed that the rules pasted on two tables were torn (see Figure 3). Consequently, this may inhibit researchers from having adequate access to handling rules and regulations and reduce awareness rate.



Search room rules and regulations

Figure 3: Torn Rules and Regulations on Table, **Source:** Field data 2021.

Item number three, in Table 1, further inquired if the researchers had ever been given written instructions on handling collections and reading-room practices. Slightly half of the respondents (n=98, 56%) said “no” whereas 44% (n=77) said “yes”. This finding can be attributed to the fact that BNARS is said to be in the process of implementing its handling rules and regulation manual, as noted by one of the archivist below:

The handling rules and regulation manual ...is still in the draft stage, but it is set to be a guide on how to use and handle archival material when used in parallel with other BNARS statutory instruments.

To further understand the search room practices at BNARS, participants were asked if the researchers had seen any staff supervising the search room. Only 29% (n=5) of the respondents indicated “yes” to the question, whereas the majority (n=125, 71%) of the respondents indicated that there had not been staff supervision in the search room. To further validate these findings, the respondents were asked to indicate how often they saw an archivist or any staff member supervising the search room. The majority (n=110, %) of the respondents indicated that they had never seen an archivist or any staff

member supervising the search room. The results indicated that 17% chose “sometime”, while 17% picked often”. Eleven (11) respondents did not answer this question.

These findings were further validated through observation. During the observation period, the researcher did not encounter BNARS staff supervising the search room. There was even a case of a reader who was found holding a pen and even brought in a handbag into the search room. Yet, none of the staff took notice of that despite their presence at the help desk.

Contrary to the findings and observation results, three archivists stated that the staff do supervise the search room as indicated in their statements below:

Everyone who uses archival materials is given orientation on proper handling of the archival materials. During his/her time of use in the reading room, there is close monitoring as the researcher goes through the files. The windows between the search room and the reading room make it easier for close monitoring of the researchers.

We observe customers through transparent window so that we can know they do not tamper with originality of our archival documents,

physical security at reception area, registration of search room visitors and CCTV [cameras] that monitor researchers in the reading room.

There is [a] large glass wall between the reading room and search room to allow staff to see through everything that happens in the reading room. Also, staff occasionally takes the rounds in the reading room to ensure that there is proper use and handling of archival materials.

Majority (70%) of the respondents in this study stated that no guidelines on good handling practices were distributed to users. These results suggested two things: first, that there was the likelihood that users could damage documents due to lack of preservation skills on good handling practices. This result is not consistent with the findings of the previous studies hence it is a new finding. This result does not match recommendation that guidelines on good handling practices should be developed and issued to users and staff. Secondly, this result means that there is an element of negligence of duty by archivists as their assignment is to develop best handling standards and give them to researchers to ensure that they read and understand them. The result obtained from the study does not appear to be in line with the previous studies. It therefore probably would constitute a new finding. It can be concluded that lack of guidelines on good handling practices contributes to archival materials deterioration at BNARS. In the United Kingdom, the availability of guidelines on good handling practices ensures proper collection care (National Preservation Office, 2000).

The results noted that majority (56%) of the respondents was not given written instructions on handling collections and reading-room practices. The data suggested that there was the likelihood that users damaged collections due to lack of awareness of handling practices and search room rules. This result is consistent with several previous studies. The results of an earlier study by the National Preservation Office (2000) reported that information and advice on how to handle archives must be given to the researchers as a way of providing protection to the documents. The same results were reported by Roper and Millar (1999), who noted that it is essential for every researcher to be given reference rules for them to read and understand prior to consulting the

archival collection. The analysis does not support the recommendation that written instructions on handling collections and reading-room practices should be given to staff and researchers alike.

Level of Compliance to Legislative and Regulatory Instruments at BNARS

The third objective of this study sought to investigate the level of compliance to legislative and regulatory instruments at BNARS. Thus, as shown in Table 2, the respondents were asked to indicate if there were procedures in place for dealing with non-compliance with rules. A negative result was obtained, as 85% (n=149) of the respondents indicated that there were no procedures for non-compliance with rules and regulations. Only 15% (n=26) of the respondents concurred that non-compliance procedures existed. Secondly, the respondents were asked to indicate if the procedures and penalties were strictly enforced. The study findings, as seen in Table 2, revealed that 93% (n=163) of the respondents disagreed that penalties for non-compliance were enforced, and only 7% (n=13) agreed that the procedures and penalties for non-compliance were enforced. Lastly, respondents were asked to indicate if they were aware of their responsibility to comply with the rules and regulations. The findings showed that there was a lack of communication and training at BNARS, as 88% (n=154) of the respondents indicated that they were not aware of their responsibility to comply with the rules and regulations. Only 13% (n=22) of the respondents agreed that they were made aware of the responsibility.

A closer look at the rules and regulations shown in Table 2 revealed that the penalties for non-compliance were not stipulated. Thus, this seems to corroborate with the findings that there was less awareness on compliance issues by the archives users at BNARS.

To support the findings in Table 2, the interviewees were asked to explain how they made users aware of their responsibility to comply with the rules and regulations. The responses were as follows:

During their visit to the search room, users are briefly updated on procedures for using and handling records. This, however, varies from archivist to archivist (First Archivist).

Table 2 Compliance with Archives Legislation (n=176)

	Yes		No	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Are there procedures in place for dealing with non-compliance with rules?	26	15%	149	85%
Are procedures and penalties for non-compliance strictly enforced?	13	7%	163	93%
Have you been made aware of your responsibility to comply with the	22	13%	154	88%

Source: Field data 2021.

* Only one respondent did not answer the third question.

The most important thing is knowledge because when you have knowledge, it is difficult to contradict the law. We try to teach users of the statutes that govern the institution and refer users to the regulations to familiarise themselves with them so that they understand the charges that can be imposed if one of the statutory instruments is broken. A fair amount of work needs to be done in this area to make sure that users understand and follow the set rules and regulations (Second Archivist).

Repeatedly when one does something that they should not I inform them of their mistake, most customers are regulars who conform to the regulations (Third Archivist).

From the above excerpts, the chances seem to be high that users were not aware of the non-compliance penalties. All the interviewees made no reference to the non-compliance penalties claimed to have been communicated to the researchers.

The last question in the section asked how often enforcement was done. The findings revealed that the frequency of the regulations enforcement. The majority (n=121, 70%) of the respondents specified they had never encountered the enforcement of rules at BNARS, while 21% (n=37) indicated that enforcement was rarely done.

These findings show that only 8% (n=13) of the respondents indicated that enforcement was done sometimes, while only 1% (n=2) indicated that it was done frequently. Lastly, the interviewees stated the laws and standards that govern the handling and use of archival materials include (1) NARS Regulations of 2011 (Section 19, Number 4), (2) conservation and preservation document, (3) ICA-Code of Ethics, (4) ISAD (G) – General International Standard Archival Description and (5) ISO 14895. Furthermore, the interviewees revealed that the BNARS staff received training to comply with the handling and use rules through: (1) informal orientation, (2) on the job training, and (3) workshops.

These results indicate that majority (85%) of the respondents were of the view that there were no procedures for non-compliance to the rules and regulations at BNARS. These results are consistent with Oweru's (2014) findings that archivists fail to act against adverse search room practices that protect archival materials against substances that endanger documents such as water. The results of this study go against the recommendation that information professionals should have non-compliance procedure that will aid the enforcement of the archives legislations. Personal observation also showed that non-compliance procedures were non-existent at BNARS. The results seem to sustain the view that there was minimal enforcement of compliance to relevant legislations and regulations.

The majority (93%) of the respondents also noted that the penalties for non-compliance were not enforced. This data suggested three things; first, that reference staff may not be adequately aware that compliance enforcement was part of preservation programme. Second, that there was the probability of violation of archives legislations by the search room staff. Third, the result implied that penalties for non-compliance were not displayed in the reading room to serve as a deterrent. The results that penalties for non-compliance were not enforced appear consistent with several previous studies. The result of the study by Qobo (2004) found that search room regulations were not applied by archivists at the Library of the National University of Lesotho. Similarly, the result of the study by Banda (2007) indicated that the reference service staff did not enforce search room rules. This study has shown that lack of archives legislation compliance enforcement exposes collections to potential dangers posed by researcher during access to archives.

Even though BNARS regularly issues policies and procedures to guide government ministries and departments in implementing their records management strategies (Mosweu, 2022), the findings of this study have shown that BNARS did not quite adhere to Section 22 of BNARS Act. This is evident by the lack of adequate archives legislations and regulations, such as handling rules, preservation policy, handling manual, compliance programme, access policy and archives administration compliance matrix. The current study's findings are not consistent with the BNARS Act, which states that the information centre, should develop statutory instruments to supplement existing archives laws. The results noted that the laws and standards that govern the handling and use of archival materials include the BNARS Regulations of 2011 and the conservation and preservation document. Compliance standard advocates the development of compliance programme and compliance culture that are supported by top management.

Conclusion

This study has established that proper handling and use of archival collection should ensure archival institutions improve records preservation and promote sustainable access to archives. The

inappropriate handling and consultation of archives show that a lot of documents are now in need of repair because of the damage caused by poor handling practices such as failure to use gloves, the rough handling of materials, use of saliva by users when turning over pages, inadequate work surfaces, inadequate reading room supervision by staff, use of pens that bleed into the archival items and distort them, folding of documents and repetitive holding and use of archives by researchers. The consequence of all these could be seen in the withdrawal of some essential materials from circulation, while others are destroyed beyond repairs. The lack of proper handling rules for guiding staff and users negate proper collection care at BNARS. It should be noted that BNARS has search room rules, but these were found to be inadequate in addressing the poor handling practices. This resulted in archival collections deterioration and loss of valuable archival materials. It can be concluded that BNARS has not effectively meet its search room requirements to safeguard the archives against any form of destruction during users' access to archival collections. This study also concludes that the enforcement of compliance to archives legislation provides full protection to documentary heritage.

Recommendations

Considering the results of this study, it is obvious that BNARS needs to develop handling and use collection guidelines. This will assist in making sure that users are made aware of the guidelines on good handling and use of document standards by displaying them prominently in reading rooms and study areas for all the readers to access and understand them. BNARS should acquire large furniture that will accommodate large files, since the current pieces of furniture are too small for oversized documents, such as maps. This study recommends training for staff and researchers to equip them with the preservation skills that are critical in ensuring that records are appropriately handled and used.

With respect to reading/search room practices, this study recommends the need for BNARS to have a system in place for recording damage to documents reported by staff and researchers in its preservation efforts. Furthermore, BNARS should have a provision for written rules and regulations.

Researchers should be offered brochures/pamphlets that they can read at their own time to remind themselves of what is required of them when handling and using archival materials. Moreover, the distribution of instruction on handling the collections and reading-room practices will go a long way in ensuring that researchers are given written instructions on handling collections and reading-room practices and ensure that they read and understand them, hence there is the preservation of archives. BNARS should also consider the introduction of a reader's ticket and a copy of the rules to be issued to all those who have applied for a reader's ticket.

This study also recommends strict compliance with the legislative and regulatory instrument at BNARS to address the poor handling practices. BNARS clients or archives users should be made to sign a written agreement that binds them to comply with the rules and regulations of the institution and when they fail to do so, they should be denied any access to the search room. It is also recommended that BNARS should impose heavy monetary penalties on those that mishandle the archival materials to promote users' commitment to obeying the rules and regulations. Finally, BNARS should display the reading room penalties conspicuously so as to debar non-compliance with the rules search room regulations in the reading room. They should also produce a compliance programme that will help the department to regularly measure and report compliance with rules and the enforcement of non-compliance with the rules and regulations.

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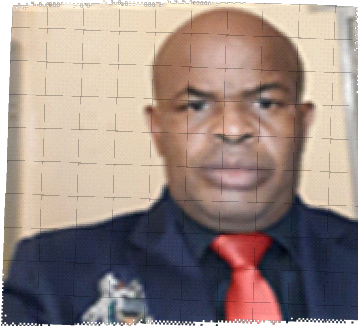
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