A framework for quality assurance for archives and records management education in an open distance e-learning environment in Eswatini

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to examine quality assurance for archives and records management (ARM) education in an open distance e-learning (ODeL) environment in Eswatini with a view to conceptualise a framework for quality assurance in the development and implementation of an ARM programme in the context of ODeL.

Design/methodology/approach – The study is anchored on the interpretive research paradigm, which surrounds a systematic literature review. The researcher searched for literature online, using scientific databases such as Ebsco, Scopus and Google Scholar. The search applied the publications from 2005 to 2019. The main search keywords are "archives", "records management", "open distance e-learning" and "quality assurance". A total of 15 articles, which included documents, journal articles, reports, web pages and monographs, were retrieved, reviewed and analysed in this study. This conceptual study was preliminary, and the researcher hopes that further empirical studies based on the findings of this study could be pursued in future.

Findings – ARM as a form of study and delivered on ODeL platforms have been proposed in Eswatini. The major concern among stakeholders is how to ensure the quality of such programmes.

Research limitations/implications – This conceptual study was preliminary, and the researcher hopes that further empirical studies based on the findings of this study could be pursued in future.

Practical implications – The findings and recommendations will help in the development of ARM programmes to be offered effectively by way of ODeL, there is a need to develop a transparent quality assurance framework for such an application and its implementation.

Originality/value – This is the first study on quality assurance for ARM education in an ODeL environment in Eswatini. As part of the study, a quality assurance framework was designed for the implementation of ARM education on an ODeL platform. This quality assurance framework is intended to help higher education institutions in Eswatini such as the University of Eswatini as well as stakeholders such as the Eswatini National Archives and others to design ARM education and deliver it on an ODeL platform in a manner that guarantees adequate quality.

Keywords Open distance e-learning, Archives and records management, Quality assurance, Education and training, Curriculum development, Eswatini

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction and background to the problem

The need for open distance e-learning (ODeL) as a form of study in archives and records management education (ARM), proposed by previous studies by Tsabedze and Ngoepe (2019), necessitated this study. In their study, they place emphasis on implementation of the ARM programme in African higher education institutions (HEIs) in general, and in Eswatini specifically. Their study demonstrates the need for a framework to implement the ARM programme through the ODeL environment in Eswatini. It emerged from the analysis in their study that few HEIs in Africa offer ARM programmes in the ODeL platform to cater to students who are already engaged in full-time employment in the corporate world. In Eswatini, in particular, one institution, the Institute of Development Management (IDM),

offered the ARM programme full time at the undergraduate level. Since this programme was offered full time, it was not convenient for prospective students in full-time employment as the lessons clashed with their work schedules. Furthermore, the offering of the ARM programme through the contact sessions only limits the involvement of foreign expertise from neighbouring countries and abroad.

In the areas of emerging technologies and the introduction of ODeL as a mode of study, a number of heated and controversial debates have been ignited. One of these centres on the matter of quality assurance (QA) in ODeL. For the processes in any quality organisation to function properly, it is essential that well-trained and competent staff be recruited. However, traditional training or regular education has several limitations in this respect. For example, training often interferes with the work of ARM professionals, especially when it takes place outside of the workplace. It is also possible that the knowledge and skills acquired during such training may not be applicable to the actual work situation in the workplace.

There are topical debates among ARM professionals, as well as among stakeholders such as the Eswatini National Archives (ENA), the Eswatini Higher Education Council (EHEC) and the government. These debates are centred on the question of whether the quality of ODeL will be as high as that of the traditional, ongoing ARM programmes. The stakeholders have identified insufficient incentive and a lack of support provided by lecturers as likely to cause a high dropout rate among students. They have also raised concerns over the matter of computer literacy skills, which might be a challenge among ARM professionals, as well as cheating during examinations. Computer-generated student assessments and the inability to verify students' identities have contributed to the emergence of cheating among ARM students. This may have the knock-on effect of students' certificates not being considered by employers due to their being unable to verify the quality of the students' skills and experience. To evaluate students efficiently, new assessment methods are required and will need to collect, classify and enable understanding of in-classroom teaching and learning. Tsabedze and Ngoepe (2019) provide insights into the effectiveness and quality of ODeL in ARM education. They also emphasise that ODeL programmes, regardless of the technology used in teaching curriculum content, are equally as effective as – and often more effective than – traditional ARM programmes. However, despite studies that point to the effectiveness of ODeL programmes and how they provide the best quality standards, the quality of ODeL in Eswatini is a topical issue among ARM professionals and stakeholders and, as such, an issue that seeks more precise and clearer responses.

This study, therefore, proposes a framework for quality assurance for ARM programmes in ODeL in Eswatini. The framework is designed in compliance with existing quality assurance of the national regulatory authority (Eswatini Higher Education Council) for quality delivery of ODeL. The proposed framework would help higher education institutions in Eswatini to design and deliver ARM programme in an ODeL in a manner that guarantees its quality. Such a programme could be offered through the University of Eswatini to accommodate students within and outside the country. Thus, ensuring that Eswatini makes its indelible imprint on the global ARM education and training landscape.

Firstly, a contextual setting of Eswatini, problem statement, aim and objectives, and ARM education are provided, followed by a justification of the need to develop a quality assurance component for the ARM programme through an ODeL environment. The study then presents a framework for QA for ARM education through an ODeL environment.

1.1 Contextual setting

With the increased access to Information Communication Technology (ICT) in Eswatini, higher education institutions (HEIs) leaders and government policymakers view ODeL as a feasible approach for increasing student access to higher education and balancing the costs

for education using these technologies. At the same time, however, national regulatory authority sees this growth of ODeL and the massive influx of for-profit educational providers entering the market as a serious threat to the quality of higher education (Common Wealth of Learning, 2009).

The Eswatini Higher Education Council (EHEC) is the controlling body for all HEIs and is concerned with the quality of both technical and vocational education and training (TVET and university education (EHEC, 2015). Eswatini Higher Education Council was established in 2006 through the Higher Education Act of 2013 to regulate Higher Education provision in Eswatini. Its mandate is to develop and implement a QA system for HEIs, which includes registration, accreditation, institutional audits, quality promotion and setting of standards. The HEIs Act describes higher education as all learning programmes commenced after high school and leading to a higher qualification. For HEIs to operate and be recognised in Eswatini, it must be registered in terms of the HEIs Act (2013); (EHEC, 2015).

The concept of quality assurance in Eswatini has many facets in HEIs. The Eswatini Higher Education Council (EHEC) focus on institutions quality indicators to ensure that institutions meet minimum quality standards for meeting the normative teaching, research and support missions of the HEIs. EHEC also ensures that HEIs in the country have the essential infrastructure (lecture rooms, computer labs, libraries, qualified lecturers, financial, etc.) to meets its mission. It also targets training programmes to ensure rigorous standards of academic quality are met. Despite the essential role played by the national regulator in ensuring quality in HEIs, the reality is they are primarily the gatekeepers and oversight agency for compliance with normative benchmarking standards. Indeed, maintaining and sustaining quality at HEIs is the responsibility of the institution.

1.2 Problem statement

In Eswatini, only the Institute of Development Management (IDM) offers ARM programmes despite the demand for the programme by private and public sector organisations. A proposal was presented by Tsabedze and Ngoepe (2019) to expand the programme through the ODeL environment. However, the worrying factor among stakeholders is ensuring quality in this regard.

Therefore, this study proposes a framework for QA for ARM programmes in ODeL in Eswatini.

The framework is designed in compliance with existing QA of the national regulatory authority (Eswatini Higher Education Council) for quality delivery of programme. Though the framework is designed in compliance with Eswatini Higher Education Council (EHEC) regulation and standard of programme development it should be noted that EHEC at the present moment does not have a specific framework for ODeL programmes.

The framework that is used in Eswatini is generic; hence, the proposed framework would help higher education institutions in Eswatini to design and deliver an ARM programme in an ODeL in a manner that guarantees its quality. Such a programme could be offered through the University of Eswatini to accommodate students from within and outside the country, thus ensuring that Eswatini would make an indelible imprint on the global ARM education and training landscape.

1.3 Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine quality assurance for ARM education in an ODeL environment in Eswatini with a view to conceptualise a framework for quality assurance in the development and implementation of an ARM programme in the context of ODeL. The specific objectives were to:

(1) Examine the status of ARM education and training in Eswatini

(2) Determine the challenges associated with quality in an ODeL programme in Eswatini

(3) Conceptualise a framework that may inform the quality assurance in the development and implementation of an ARM programme in an ODeL environment in Eswatini.

2. Methodology

The current study was anchored on the interpretive research paradigm, which surrounds a systematic literature review. A systematic review was conducted to debunk the worrying factor among stakeholders on the issue about the absence of quality for archive and records management in ODeL environment in Eswatini. The systematic literature review summarised the broad view and current scenario about a selected topic. It used pre-defined techniques and findings are documented in a systematic review protocol. A systematic literature review is based on critical examination and analysis of the facts and figure or evidence that arise from a careful synthesis of the available literature according to pre-defined and shared measures. Therefore, it requires a well-structure process that conceptualises the key decisions of the review, which is how studies will be identified, analysed, selected and evaluated (Stracke, 2019; Booth *et al.*, 2016). In the current review, the authors followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement which consists of a 27-items checklist that regards methods, results, discussion and finding along with a four-phase flow diagram that concerns records, identifications, records screening, articles eligibility and studies included.

In order to achieve the results preceding screening and for the full-text analysis, the authors define some selection criteria which are (*i*): the literature must be written in the English language, and (ii) the literature integrated must be available in full-text to enable many relevant results eligible for analysis. The researcher searched for literature online, using scientific databases such as Ebsco, Scopus and Google Scholar. The search applied the publications from 2005 to 2019. The main search keywords are "archives", "records management", "open distance e-learning" and "quality assurance". A total of 15 articles, which included documents, journal articles, reports, web pages and monographs, were retrieved, reviewed and analysed in this study. The records that were not fulfilling the selection criteria were also removed.

3. ARM education and training in Eswatini

Education and training for archives and records management (ARM) professionals in Eswatini has taken a new direction in the face of far-reaching developments sparked off by the trend towards globalisation. Although the challenges of records management in government ministries and department are many, they are not insurmountable given our human capacity to adapt to change. It is largely true that government ministries and departments in Eswatini are adapting to change brought about by the e-Government and the implementation of an Electronic Document Management System (EDRMS). ARM professionals are not only having to adapt to change but also require in-depth and structured education and training programmes for occupation engagements in the ministries. However, one important aspect of such professional discourses derives from the search for suitable, relevant academic and professional programmes is one that should be made available in ARM institutions in Eswatini in response to the industry needs.

Some initiatives have been taken to proposed online education in the country. One of such recent studies by Tsabedze and Ngoepe (2019) proposed a framework for ARM education in an open distance e-learning environment in Eswatini and another study by Tsabedze (2019)

focused on a framework for the massive online open course in archives and records management in Eswatini.

3.1 ARM education in an open distance e-learning environment in Eswatini
In a recent study by Tsabedze and Ngoepe (2019), it was established that the ARM in Eswatini has faced numerous challenges over the years. These challenges have resulted in the poor governance and accountability structures within the government ministries and departments in Eswatini. The developments in ARM training by local institutions have not done much to improve records keeping practices in organizations. Their study revealed that one of the root causes of the problem in the ARM is the lack of training programmes in this niche area in almost all institutions of higher learning in Eswatini. The Institute of Development Management (IDM) is the only institution offering ARM training at undergraduate diploma level. This shows that although there is a need for trained ARM officers in the industry, there is limited access for the training of such officers.

Tsabedze (2018) also reveals that the majority of records officers in government ministries in Eswatini have not been trained in ARM due to non-availability of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the country that offers the programme whose delivery mode caters for their needs as full-time employees. Hence, Eswatini sends prospective professionals for archives and records management higher education to other countries due to inadequacies in its education and training programmes. Scholarships for prospective students are mainly available for archives and records management institutions situated in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. The government of Eswatini, through the Ministry of Education and Training and the Ministry of Public Service, has been the main sponsor of incumbent professionals who has been trained at different degree levels.

Education and training outside the country may also increase dependence on the external environment and promote the notion that valuable training can only be obtained outside the country. Another challenge is that of cost, as education and training outside the country require a considerable amount of money, thus limiting the number of archives and records management applicants who may have access to education and training at a given time.

In the light of all, Tsabedze and Ngoepe (2019) in their study proposed a framework for ARM education in an ODeL environment in Eswatini. The framework attempts to address both the programme content and the delivery mode, which will address the needs of both the industry and trainees in ARM. They recommended that the framework should be implemented by the University of Eswatini (UNESWA) through engagement with the stakeholders' community. The university has adequate resources necessary for the implementation of the proposed framework. Offering ARM programme through ODeL environment at UNESWA will go a long way in ensuring that upcoming local Eswatini academics in this field are mentored virtually and be able to sustain the programmes. Apart from being adopted by the university, the developed framework is also suitable for adoption by other HEI that share the same context in Eswatini and abroad.

3.2 ARM education in a massive open online course in Eswatini
Another study conducted by Tsabedze (2019) revealed that ARM education and training is advanced in the developed world. However, in Eswatini, it is still at its infancy as only one institution (Institute of Development Management) offers an ARM programme at undergraduate certificate and diploma levels. Regardless of the effort to expand the programme, the issue of qualified staff and facilities to foster the programme remains unsolved in Eswatini. This compounded the lamentation by the beneficiary of the programme, the Eswatini National Archives (ENA). The Eswatini National Archives and

Ministry of Public Services (MOPS) expects that the ARM programme should address the public sector needs, which have resulted in poor governance and accountability structures within government ministries and departments. This scenario has been attributed to the inadequate and appropriate comprehensive ARM curriculum in Eswatini higher education institutions (HEIs). The criticism from Eswatini National Archives and Ministry of Public Service suggests that ARM graduates are perceived as being inadequately prepared for their workplace environment. Considering this situation in Eswatini, Tsabedze (2019) proposed a framework for the inclusion of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) as an alternative for ARM in HEIs in Eswatini. MOOCs have been applied in other contexts and content but not in Eswatini; hence, this approach for instruction in tertiary institutions is hereby suggested. The study guides ARM academic staff in how to design and apply an ARM course in the educational material for MOOCs.

3.3 Inadequate ARM lectures

It is generally recognised that in our knowledge-based and technology-driven global village, each country's economic and social well-being depends on its ability to harness its human resources through a dynamic and innovative educational system; one that thrives on and propels technological development. This required link between educational and technological progress is particularly critical at the higher levels of the educational system, and especially, for university education. Unfortunately, there is an inadequate number of lecturers, especially at the postgraduate level, especially in the field of the ARM programme. Most of the lecturers in Eswatini completed library and information science (LIS) at the post-graduate level, and only a few did a postgraduate in ARM.

3.4 The controversial debate on open distance e-learning in Eswatini

Open distance e-learning (ODeL) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in Eswatini as a proposed form of study in ARM education has ignited heated debates among ARM professionals and stakeholders in Eswatini. One of these controversial debates about ODeL and MOOCs in ARM education is on the issue of quality assurance. According to Tsabedze and Ngoepe (2019), ODeL in ARM education will provide each student with opportunities to engage with the materials via formative assessments and the ability to personalise their learning environment. The authors recommended ODeL platform rather than face-to-face since most of the ARM professionals are already working and they don't have time to attend classes on the fulltime bases. On the other hand, the ARM professionals and stakeholders such as Eswatini National Archives (ENA) and employers have criticised ODeL for their assessment methods that lack constructive feedback and for their low level of comprehensibility. The lack of critical, creative and original thinking and students' low completion rates have also been noted. Equally, the contribution of ODeL to better access to higher education in Eswatini is disputed.

There have also been more negative criticisms about MOOCs in ARM as a form of study. Tsabedze (2019) highlighted that ARM in MOOCs will rely on the transmission of information, computer-marked assignments and peer assessment. The ARM MOOCs were also being criticised for lack of constructive feedback, their low level of comprehensibility, their lack of critical, creative and original thinking and their low completion rates. However, Tsabedze (2019) argues against criticisms on ARM MOOC completion rates that are based on figures that include enrollees who are not interested in completing the programme.

Given the challenges alluded to above, this study proposes a framework for quality assurance in ARM programmes in the context of ODeL in Eswatini. The study further recommends that the University of Eswatini's Institute of Distance Education Departments adapts, adopts, implements, monitors and evaluates this framework.

4. A proposed framework for quality assurance for ARM education in an open distance e-learning environment

The study established that developing a local programme and delivering it on open distance e-learning would be useful, less costly and convenient as it would allow employees to work and train at the same time. Open distance e-learning is an untested phenomenon in Eswatini, and as a result, there is debate surrounding their quality and effectiveness. In light of this, for the ARM programmes to be offered effectively on ODeL, there is a need to develop a transparent quality assurance framework for such an application and its implementation. The study designed a quality assurance framework for the implementation of ARM education on an ODeL platform as reflected in Figure 1. This quality assurance framework would help higher education institutions in Eswatini such as the University of Eswatini (UNESWA) and stakeholders such as Eswatini National Archives and others to design ARM education and deliver it on an open distance e-learning platform in a manner that guarantees its quality.

4.1 Principles guiding the formulation of this framework

With regard to the quality assurance framework for the implementation of open distance e-learning programmes in Eswatini, the University of Eswatini established the Institute of Distance Education (IDE), where some programmes have been offered through distance education. The experience of the IDE is that open distance e-learning programmes are managed by staff who are also involved in conventional programmes. This creates a clash of priorities in favour of conventional programmes. However, the delivery mode of ODeL versus conventional programmes requires a different regulatory framework for management and administrative processes (Tsabedze and Ngoepe, 2019).
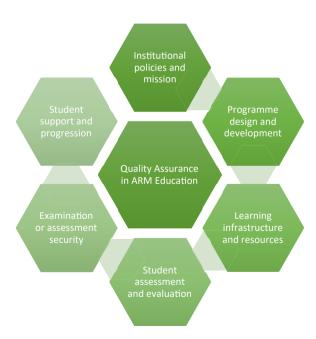

Figure 1.
Proposed framework
for QA for ARM
programmes in ODeL

This proposed framework is designed to guide the implementation of quality, harmonisation and standardisation of the ARM programme. This framework is based on the following assumptions:

(1) The University of Eswatini (UNESWA) recognises the authority and oversight responsibilities for quality assurance of HEIs by Eswatini Higher education Council (EHEC). The Eswatini Higher education Council is independent of universities, and it accredits both the programmes and institutions in the country.

(2) The framework will encompass a comprehensive quality assurance framework rather than an ARM programme by programme approach thereby providing minimum criteria for institutions to assess existing and future academic programmes primarily delivered via open and distance e-learning.

(3) The University of Eswatini partner institutions is critical resources and stakeholders given their experience. UNESWA partner institutions reflect the continuum of diversity, ethnicity, institutional missions and delivery strategies that will be the primary resource for collectively identifying criteria for different competency levels based upon inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes.

(4) As an interinstitutional, multi-national partnership, these guidelines are intended to provide maximum flexibility and adaptability to meet UNESWA and local institutions needs and comply with EHEC, and institutional quality assurance mechanisms already in place at the respective HEIs. The framework has been designated as a set of guidelines to recognise that each partner institution must have the flexibility to adapt these to national and institutional needs for ensuring quality in ARM in as open distance e-learning.

(5) Establishing minimum competency standards for quality assurance purposes that are flexible, meet national and institutional needs and draw upon the partner universities for advice, consultation and collaboration.

(6) The framework has drawn upon African and international institutional benchmarks for quality assurance in ODL programmes as the baseline from which to create the quality assurance framework for ARM education. Precisely, the current guidelines have been drawn from the collective work of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in conjunction with the best practices and standards employed by US Accrediting Commissions and quality assurance agencies across the Commonwealth nations (Common Wealth of Learning, 2009).

4.2 Explanation of the framework

This proposed framework, therefore, builds on the existing body of knowledge regarding quality assurance for an ODeL environment. The framework considers quality assurance as to the main driver of open distance e-learning. It does not only explain quality assurance having a controlling effect on ODeL, but it also reveals some other influential factors. Hence, the framework considers all elements having an impact on both educational settings and products at all stages of open distance e-learning. The elements of the framework include:

(1) Institutional policies and mission guiding ODeL

(2) Programme design and development,

(3) Learning infrastructure and resources,

(4) Student assessment and evaluation,

(5) Examination or assessment security, and

(6) Student support and progression.

4.3 Institutional policies and mission guiding ODeL

The success of the archives and records management programme to a large extent depends on the support provided by the University of Eswatini. The university should revise its mission, policies, and procedures to reflect its commitment to distance learning and its distance learning initiatives. The mission statement should be relevant to the UNESWA operational context and supported by clearly defined goals and objectives. Financial, human and infrastructure resources are needed to develop and support the ARM programmes effectively. Therefore, during the implementation phase, UNESWA may need to increase the amount of funding to address the problem of maladministration and may need to reorganise the administrative and technical infrastructure (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, 2008).

4.4 Programme design and development

The ARM course content must be underpinned by market research. The course material should contain the following: the objectives and learning outcomes, the content, the approach to teaching and learning, the assessment and what student support is available. There is a wide range of interactive multimedia presentations that include texts, images, audio and video. Therefore, the University of Eswatini must adopt multimedia to increase ARM students' engagement and motivation, which is suited to different learning styles. The main quality challenges are the creation, selection and sequencing of material. Since there is a diversity of options, it is evident that lecturers cannot prepare the ARM course material on their own; in many cases, when it comes to mixed media, an entire team of ARM experts must be involved. Therefore, ARM departmental collaboration and technological provision are essential criteria for the development of quality material.

4.5 Learning infrastructure and resources

Technological quality indicators are the following: platforms used to implement ODeL programmes; digital programmes that are used to prepare distance learning material; Internet access; equipment for the acquisition of a distance learning course; student and teaching staff support Frydenberg (2002); Dondi and Morreti (2006); Rubin (2009); Holsombach-Ebner (2013); Al-Shorbaji *et al.* (2015); Al-Hunaiyyan *et al.* (2016).

ODeL programme is delivered using various course management systems and platforms; Moodle, being one of the most well-known, which can be accessed via the internet. These tools are pedagogically advanced platforms that provide a wide range of synchronous and asynchronous tools and incorporate mechanisms for evaluating students and tracking student progress. The technical infrastructure must be reliable and easy to use (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, 2008).

Effective distance learning requires the course developer to hold relevant qualifications that pertain to the field. The lecturer must also be able to work with a digital programme to create an interactive multimedia tool. In turn, for a student to acquire distance learning course material, essential technological competencies are required, namely: adding and managing files, managing e-communications and being able to use a web browser (Clark and Frith, 2013). Therefore, the support and institutional co-operation of students and lecturing staff is an essential aspect of the development and quality control of the distance learning course. This is because e-learning material must be functional and non-defective and should apply to all operating systems and browsers in the environment in which the resource is run. Copyright is critical; therefore, the author of distance learning material development must be

acknowledged. The e-learning document provider should provide the students with the necessary equipment for the acquisition of the course (Nsiah and Oti-Boadi, 2015).

4.6 Student assessment and evaluation

Student assessment is a crucial feature of the teaching and learning process in ARM programme and it needs to be properly managed. The assessments should also reflect institutional and international standards. UNESWA should publish its academic grading policy and applies it with fairness and consistency. The ARM student evaluation should be based on the stated programme objectives.

4.7 Examination or assessment security

Examination or assessment security and authenticity is an important consideration in quality online learning. The study revealed that ARM professionals and stakeholders are skeptical of the possibilities of ODeL quality assurance when it comes to examination or assessment. Although ODeL offers flexibility in assessment, if not managed effectively, this flexibility can create a problem of security and verification. The issues of identification in the context of assignments are not new in HEIs. In most of the time assignments are completed outside the learning environment, raising the same challenges of being sure that learners did their assignments. Students' identity is also another challenge that was raised by ARM professionals when students sit for an examination, at contact institutions that work in partnership with UNESWA. In ODeL many technologies can be used to ensure that there is security in an examination. UNESWA could adopt web cameras, computer identification and finger scans (biometric authentication) (Sarrayrih and IIyas, 2013). The ARM students can also be verified by using live oral examinations or dialogues using video conferencing software. There is new examination security software that provides the means to "lockdown" the devices being used when taking examinations, thus prevent access to foreign objects or non-examination materials. The university can also invest by purchasing a plagiarism software, for example, Turnitin software. While detection of plagiarism is important, the university must raise awareness of the key issues on plagiarism to the ARM students.

4.8 Student support and progression

Archives and records management students should be supported through distance tutoring that makes use of various forms of technology. Contact tutoring, assignment tutoring, mentoring, counselling and the stimulation of peer support structures to facilitate their holistic progression can aid tutoring. The quality indicators for the ARM students are as follows: the student-centred approach in the educational process; the satisfaction of the students; personal growth and the results achieved. Active involvement of students in the learning process is the main task of open distance e-learning.

Pelz (2004) argues that the more quality time students spend engaging with content, the more they will learn from this content. Create tasks that require self-assessment of jobs or include other students in the evaluation to assess student engagement with the content. Pelz (2004) claims is to promote a student–lecturer and student-student interaction, which extends beyond the simple discussion. Such an approach could be realised in the formation of joint groups by updating and solving some of the ARM problems.

Pelz (2004) highlighted the importance of the presence of a representative of the lecturing staff in the open distance e-learning. This presence encompasses three dimensions, namely:

(1) Social presence, when the learner needs the approval of common goals and/or expression of emotions from other learners;

(2) Cognitive knowledge that can take the form of a discussion, bringing in actual, conceptual and theoretical knowledge;

(3) Learning aimed at the implementation of meaningful outcomes of learning that are educationally valuable, which in turn results in consensus, student encouragement and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the process.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The study analysed the implementation of the quality assurance ARM programme in Eswatini. A literature review was conducted to demonstrate the need for a quality assurance framework to implement ARM programme through ODeL environment in Eswatini. Developing a local programme and delivering it on the ODeL platform would be useful, less costly and convenient as it would allow employees to work and train at the same time. ODeL programmes are an untested phenomenon in Eswatini, and as a result, there is a debate surrounding their quality and effectiveness.

Based on the analysis and the status of the ARM programme in Eswatini the study developed a framework for QA for implementation of the ARM programme in an ODeL platform in a manner that guarantees its quality. This framework was informed by a literature review. The study proposed that this framework should be implemented by the UNESWA through engagement with the stakeholder community. UNESWA has adequate resources necessary for the implementation of the proposed framework. Offering ARM programme through ODeL environment at UNESWA will go a long way in ensuring that upcoming local Eswatini academics in this field are mentored virtually and be able to sustain the programmes. Apart from being adopted by UNESWA, the developed framework is also suitable for adoption by other HEI that share the same context in Eswatini and abroad. This conceptual study was preliminary, and the researchers hope that further empirical studies based on the findings of this study could be pursued in future.

This study generates knowledge on the possibility of adapting an ODeL driven ARM framework to enhance the quality of education in Eswatini. It adds to the corpus of knowledge on how to enhance the quality of ARM in an ODeL context. Furthermore, the future possible result of the adaptation of the proposed framework to guarantee quality ARM programmes on an ODeL platform in Eswatini will position the country on the global ARM landscape. The study has generated knowledge on the adaptation of ODeL driven ARM programmes in Eswatini and this will be useful in supporting decision-makers and spurring further research.

Such future studies prompted by this study would allow stakeholders such as EHEC, HEIs, academics and researchers to critique, comment and contribute to the betterment of the proposed framework for designing and delivering ARM programme using an ODeL mode. Further research in this scenario would enable future researchers to improve the framework or to customise it to suit their contexts in their respective institutions in Eswatini and other countries and communities where the framework would be deemed relevant for adoption or adaptation. It is essential to state that having further studies in the future based on empirical evidence would add to the quality of the framework and ensures the quality of the ARM programme delivered through the ODeL mode.

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