

EXPLORING THE PRESERVATION OF DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE IN MALAWI

Paper to Be Presented at the Archival Conference on the
Use of Records and Archives for Social, Economic and
Political Development, Victoria Falls from the 8th – 12th June
2015


By
Robert Moffat Mkuwira
National Archives of Malawi
E-mail: moffatmkuwira@yahoo.co.uk

Outline

- Introduction
- Methodology
- Findings
- Conclusion

Background

- Since time immemorial, archives, libraries, museums and other places across the world have been the guardians of documentary heritage.
- UNESCO (2010) defines documentary heritage as items that are moveable; comprised of signs, codes, sounds and images; capable of preservation; reproducible; and they are products of deliberate documenting process.

- 
- Edmondson (2002) says that much of the documentary across the globe is at risk.
 - Preservation provides a means by which survival of materials is ensured for enduring access and use.
 - Preservation and access are just two parts of the same mission in regards to documentary heritage as they all aim at facilitating usage.

- Sawant (2014) defines preservation as activities associated with maintaining library and archival materials for use either in their original physical form or in some other usable ways.
- Preservation tends to include conservation, but also comprehends techniques of partial preservation of the physical object like a new binding, as well as procedures for the substitution of the original artifact by materials conversion, whereby the intellectual content of the original is at least preserved.

National Archives

- The National Archives of Malawi is a Government Department in the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Culture.
- It was established in July 1947.
- Currently, the National Archives of Malawi operates through several service points comprising of Records Management Service with Regional Records Centres in Zomba, Lilongwe and Mzuzu.
- The other service points are Public Archives, Historical Manuscripts, Legal Deposit Library, Conservation Centre, and Administration and Support Services whose offices are all based at the Headquarters in Zomba.

Statement of the Problem

- With time and other factors, conditions of documentary heritage depreciate.
- National Archives of Malawi does not seem to be pleased with this.
- It works hard as possible to reverse and slow down this depreciation.

Purpose of the Study

- To explore why documentary heritage is preserved in Malawi?

Objectives


- The objectives of the study are to:
 - Identify documentary heritage preserved at the National Archives of Malawi,
 - Determine the purpose(s) of preserving documentary heritage,
 - Find out challenges faced when preserving documentary heritage,
 - Determine how to handle those challenges,
 - Offer recommendations on how documentary heritage can be preserved

Significance of the Study

- The findings from this study will assist National Archives of Malawi and other institutions involved in the preservation of documentary heritage to have an insight in the preservation of documentary materials.
- The study will help the National Archives of Malawi to come up with sustainable preservation programmes. This research will also simulate others to do more research on preservation of documentary heritage.

Methodology

- The study employed an exploratory sequential mixed methods design.
- Data was collected from National Archives of Malawi using a questionnaire, document review and participant observation.
- The questionnaire was distributed to 6 senior staff members.

- 
- Ethical issues that surrounded the research were confidentiality, privacy and informed consent, these were observed.
 - Data was analysed manually and also using Microsoft Excel.

Findings

Documentary heritage materials preserved

- Documentary heritage materials preserved at the National Archives of Malawi include:
 - Public archives,
 - Historical manuscripts,
 - Printed and published works deposited with the National Archives Malawi.
- These materials are also in different forms from paper, graphic and micrographic materials, magnetic materials, optical materials.

Purposes of Preserving Documentary Heritage

- It was found that documentary heritage exist to be accessed and are important to the society as they contribute to:
 - People's enjoyment and inspiration,
 - Cultural values,
 - Learning potential,
 - Economic prosperity and
 - Social equity.
- The study looked further on the usage of the materials in terms of user categories and levels of usage.

Figure 1: User Categories (N=312)

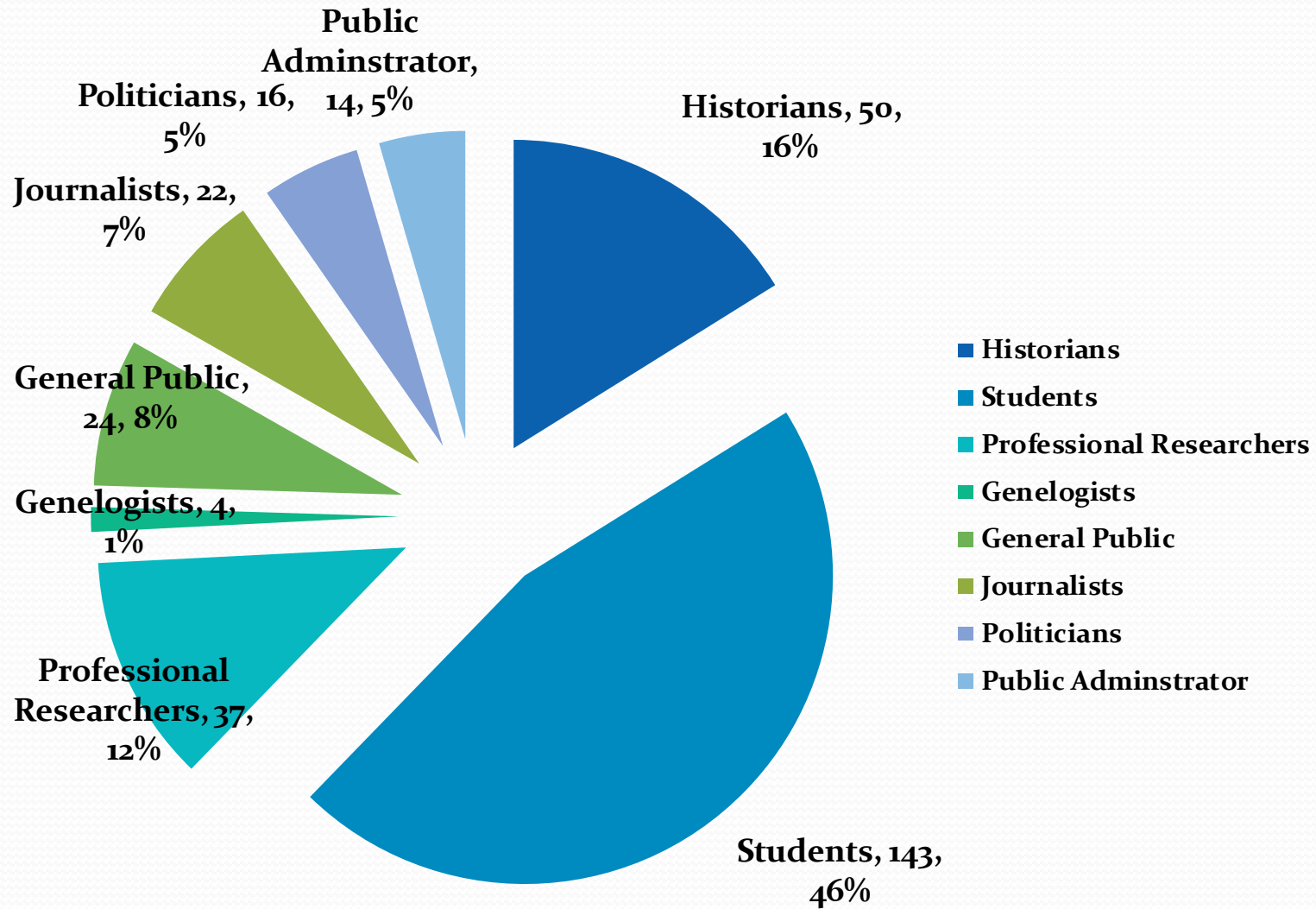
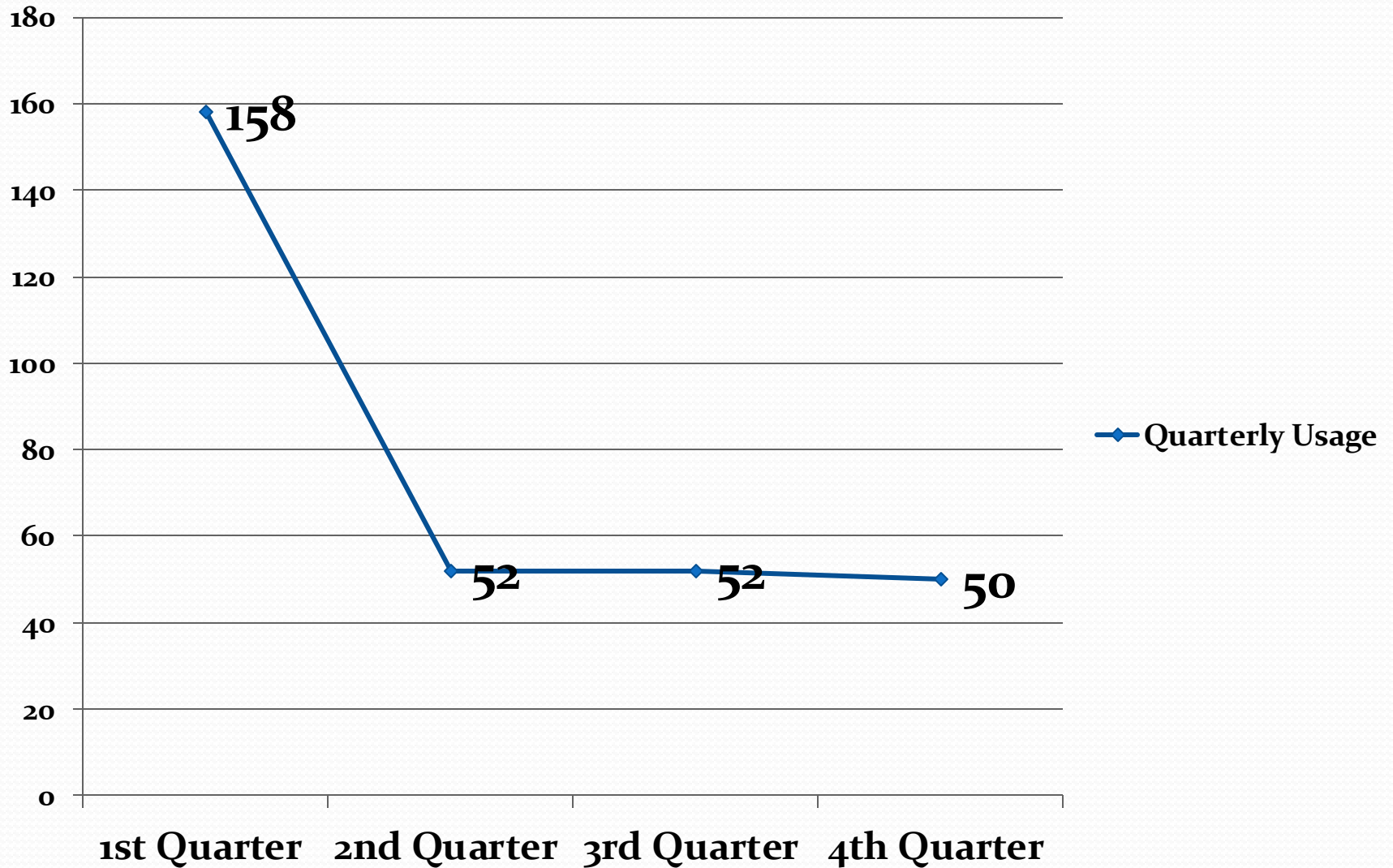


Figure 2: Quarterly Usage (N=312)




Challenges Faced When Preserving Documentary Heritage

- The study discovered that:
 - lack of purposely built infrastructure,
 - limited funding and
 - understaffing
- have negatively affected the preservation of documentary heritage at National Archives of Malawi

How Challenges Faced When Preserving Documentary Heritage Are Handled

- lack of purposely built infrastructure
 - the department has been persistently appealing to the Government to consider providing for a spacious and purposely built infrastructure for better preservation of the precious national heritage.
- While waiting for a positive consideration from Government on this matter, the department undertakes periodic rehabilitation of the existing buildings.

- limited funding
 - The National Archives of Malawi has been discussing with the Government treasury to consider increasing funding for the department.
 - While waiting for the response, the provided financial resources are used prudently and also proposals have been sent to different organisation to provide support in specific areas

- 
- Inadequate human resource
 - the National Archives of Malawi has been discussing with authorities in the Government to deploy more staff to the institution.
 - While waiting for the response current members work as a team.

Conclusion

- Documentary heritage forms an important aspect of the country's memory.
- They help in bridging the past and the present and in shaping the future.
- These materials are important as they promote people's enjoyment and inspiration, cultural values, learning, economic prosperity and social equity.

- Based on the findings this study recommends that:
 - These materials should be promoted to other users as it has been shown that they mostly used by students.
 - While taking care of the existing infrastructure, the institution should push for the customized infrastructure.
 - The institution should use the available funds on priorities while they fight for more funds.
 - The current staff should work as a team and also they should plead for more staff.

Reference

- Edmondson, R. (2002). *Memory of the World: General Guidelines*, (Revised edition). Paris: UNESCO.
- Sawant, S. (2014). A study on preservation and conservation practices in academic libraries in Mumbai. *Annals of Library and Information Studies* Vol. 61, . 153-159.
- UNESCO (2010). *Safeguarding the documentary heritage of humanity*.
URL: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001877/187733e.pdf>
(Accessed 20 October, 2014).