A NATIONAL ELECTRONIC THESES AND DISSERTATIONS PROJECT FOR GHANA: A POLICY FRAMEWORK

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Abstract:
Objective: The Ghana e-theses project should be a national asset that would provide full text electronic access to doctoral and masters theses and dissertations accepted by higher education institutions in the country.
Method: A literature search for national ETD policy frameworks was conducted on Google. The searches were guided by personal experience with ETDs and policy frameworks that have worked in other countries.
Findings: The case studies examined and gave details of two institutional and four national initiatives on ETDs which could be adapted to the peculiar circumstance of Ghana.

*Keywords***:**
ETDs, Electronic theses and dissertations, Ghana universities, Postgraduate theses and dissertations

INTRODUCTION

Access to ETDs in Ghana is fragmented because theses and dissertations are kept in institutional repositories by individual institutions. Most higher education institutions continue to accept printed and bound copies of theses and dissertations. However, there are bold institutional efforts by the KNUST (Corletey 2011), the University of Ghana Digital Collections (UoG 2002), coupled with the AAU's DATAD (Database on African Theses and Dissertations) project (AAU 2018) to enhance access to masters and doctoral degree research. What is being proposed is a national resource to bring together the results of postgraduate research in a much more accessible format such as exists with the UK's EThOS e-theses service (British Library, nd). E-theses allow students to express their research results in creative and flexible ways that would not be possible if they were limited to paper based output. 'Born digital' theses may include audio and visual material and may not even be read in a traditional linear format. Such theses, incorporating multimedia as an integral part of the work, may not have a paper equivalent. An ETD programme gives procedures, standards, quality control, software configuration and customization, and hardware infrastructure among other requirements (Lippincott 2006, Mishra et al 2007; both cited in Mohamed and Divya 2018).

Examples of national ETD initiatives can be found in China, India, Japan and the UK. In Taiwan, the National Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD-Taiwan) serves as a national union catalogue and as a national repository of electronic analogues of traditional paper-based theses and dissertations. A multi-tiered framework in deposits and services was used to achieve the collaboration and cooperation with universities and colleges in Taiwan (Chia-Ning et al 2014). In Japan, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) made an amendment to the Degree Regulations to keep with recent global developments in digitisation and Open Access policy for scholarly information. Basically, the amendment required all the doctoral theses granted in Japan to be made publicly available on the Internet. In response, the Japanese Coordinating Committee for University Libraries (JCCUL) and other stakeholder institutions cooperatively revised the national metadata standard for description of doctoral theses.

Similarly, the University Grants Commission of India (UGC) drafted a national policy framework in 2005 entitled "UGC (Submission of Metadata and Full-text of Doctoral Theses in Electronic Format) Regulations, 2005" (Das, Sen & Dutta 2007). This Regulation proposed two sets of planned actions: the creation of a national theses database and the submission of PhD theses in electronic form. The Indian National Theses Database (INTED) is an online centralized bibliographic database, where online submission of metadata sets of PhD theses is mandatory when the researcher finally submits their thesis to the Research Cell of a university. The PhD supervisor verifies and validates the metadata of submitting PhD thesis. In the UK, the Electronic Theses online Service (EThOS) is the national e-theses service for UK doctoral theses which demonstrates the quality of UK research by making UK doctoral theses discoverable and openly available online. It supports the UK Government's open access principle that publications resulting from publicly-funded research should be made freely available for all researchers, providing opportunities for further research.

At the institutional level, the traditional paper-based theses and dissertations will have to be replaced by electronic submission as was the case at the University of Sydney:

> *To effectively build and maintain an EDT collection requires not only a mandate but a significant policy shift across the organisation… [by] effectively allowing the Library to change the way it collects, stores, manages and disseminates theses. .. the Library will quickly phase out the collection of bound paper based theses making EDTs the only accepted format… (University of Sydney, c2014)*

The paper details challenges around the implementation of such a policy, the impact that the institutional repository has had, through successfully managing voluntary EDT submission, in driving such a policy shift across the institution. It discussed the support infrastructure and changes in internal processes that were essential to meet the policy shift and successfully move to an EDT only environment. Also, the University of Aberdeen has a mandate requiring graduating doctoral students to deposit an e-copy of newly submitted theses into the Research Theses repository. Bebbington (2013) in his paper reviewed key issues in establishing an institutional policy on graduate deposit of e-theses – including establishing appropriate University regulations and processes on e-deposit, strategies for compliance with the mandate, approaches to managing copyright and other legal issues, how to deal with theses which contain embargoed or confidential information, and the necessity for repository notice-and takedown procedures.

METHODOLOGY

The literature on ETDs was reviewed for institutional and national efforts at providing open access to theses and dissertations. Four national intiatives were identified as case studies to inform the framework for Ghana's ETD project. A Google search on 'etd policy framework' gave enough hits for the research. The ETD conference website was also searhed for additonal information. Notes were made of the insititutions that championed the adoption of electronic access, the main stakeholders and policy implications at both institutional and national levels. Individual intitutional accounts of changes in policy and internal processes made to ensure success were also noted. The case study method was found suitable because it lends itself to easy application in digital library projects such as e-theses.

PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

Should a national 'crusade' be made to get all universities in Ghana to comply as was reported in India (Das, Sen & Dutta 2007) and Japan (Nakayama et al 2013)? In both case studies, there was evidence that the establishment of repositories at the institutional level was adequate to sustain a national level development of ETDs. However, the case in Ghana is quite different.

At the institutional level

In in a bottom up approach, individual universities would be invited to take part on a pilot basis in a phased out approach to a national e-theses project. In the first phase each volunteer institution has to have a policy change in the way theses and dissertations are submitted. Vijayakumar et al (2004 p69) asserted that popularization of ETDs and its full advantages for faculty, students, and researchers are the foremost attempt for the start of any ETD project:

Brochures, communications, websites etc. conveying this information need to be written, designed, published and disseminated to all affected by this far-reaching change. Workshops and training programmes for both students and faculty need to be developed that cover issues of copyright and choice of access, and that encourage research scholars to carefully consider the ethics of restricting their research from access by the national and international scholarly community.

Additionally, well-equipped computer labs must be put in place to provide workstations, software, and technical support staff for students writing ETDs. Standards need to be developed for the presentation of dissertation research. A careful consideration of these requirements and their full support will contribute substantially to making this transition smoothly. As a key stakeholder, the library will collaborate with two other main stakeholders (Graduate School and the IT Department) to write a pre- project proposal to the high administrative officers. The main topics of the pre-project proposal should include but not limited to: benefits to students, the institution, the country, region, and society; the characteristics of the ETD programme and of digital library; results to be achieved, including an estimate of the resources (human and material); time frame and stakeholder commitments. The pre-project proposal will be followed by documentation on contents and guidelines for students and supervisors, and the creation of a web site on the library home page. The third phase will be the implementation, which will be broken down into sub phases of: training for staff, students, and lectures, and the running of a 12-month pilot. Phases 4 and 5 will cover full implementation and the conversion of printed theses into electronic archive respectively. An ETD Working Group would propose a one-year voluntary pilot study to assess the procedural feasibility and scholarly advantages of accepting theses and dissertations in electronic rather than paper-based format at the university.

At the national level
At the national level, institutional collections would be brought together in the form of a union catalogue. This would be joined by other universities in the country who shall be supported and required to join by an agreed and workable deadline. A policy framework on this scale would require input from the universities, the university accreditation body (NAB), the Ministry of Education, and other notable local stakeholders, such as CARLIGH and the CSIR. Lobbying institutional heads, university librarians (of both public and private universities), and the AAU is to ensure a buy-in that is aimed at advocacy, and at the same time raising the needed resources in terms of funding for infrastructure and training. Marketing and advocacy campaigns could gain both financial support and visibility from the AAU, which is the African continental association of universities. İt is argued that the adoption of electronic theses as opposed to print theses has a lot of benefits, including a wider access to Ghanaian research. In the wider context of knowledge creation, making postgraduate research in Ghana open access and easily available through a deliberate national effort to implement a Ghana e-theses project is feasible and doable. İn a medium term planning period of 3-5 years, Ghana could join other countries who have successfully implemented ETDs by making the works of graduate research easily accessible to the rest of the world.

CONCLUSIONS
As late adopters of the e-theses concept, the country's universities and research institutions shall 'leap-frog' a vital development in graduate education. In particular, the Project will seek to improve graduate education by allowing students to produce electronic documents, use digital

libraries, and understand issues in scholarly communication and publication. As a positive development in graduate education, graduate student research achieves broader exposure, new opportunities for creative scholarship open up, and students receive some experience in the technological skills required of many scholars today. Also, the institutions, their libraries and students reduce the costs involved in publishing and storing dissertations and theses.

I concur with Das, Sen & Dutta (2007 p16) that 'National capacity building and self-sufficiency in maintaining electronic theses and dissertations can only be achieved by concerted approaches to this problem from national policy making agencies'. Advocacy and training through the committee of university librarians, the NAB, the CSIR, and CARLIGH will be critical to realising the objectives of the Ghana e-theses project.

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