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ETDs and institutional repositories: The place of institutional factors

Abstract

This paper will look at the roles of institutional factors in having in place effective ETDs through institutional repositories ((IRs). The paper will: be informational in nature, do extensive review of relevant literature and discuss: the concept, relevance and importance of ETDs; problems associated with ETDs; and institutional factors such as institutional policy, institutional culture, funding, motivational factors and environmental factors as factors that can affect ETDs dissemination through IR. Further, it will describe: Institutional Repositories and their importance in information dissemination; and the challenges associated with institutional repositories in developing countries with specific emphasis on the Nigerian context.

ETDs and institutional repositories: The place of institutional factors

The main purpose of theses and dissertations is to involve the students in the procedure of scholarly research writings under the supervision of veteran faculty members. They symbolize research output of universities and are intellectual capital of both the authors and the institutions at which they were created. They are considered valuable sources of research information for researchers, scholars and students, providing research format, methodology, and pattern for beginners. Moreover, these are comprised of various novel ideas, new creations and outcomes of recent research work and also provide new directions for future research.

Institutional repositories make up an important part of present day digital libraries permitting worldwide access to scholarly publications and providing an opportunity for future research enhancement and long term preservation of information. Due to the remarkable changes in modes of scholarly communications and information landscape, electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs) signify a growing segment of available content in institutional repositories where they add to the impact and ranking of their institutions. ETD repositories not only profit students and institutions by enhancing education and expanding research, but also by increasing a university's visibility and thereby contributing to the impact and ranking of the parent institutions.

Traditional methods of archiving and storing theses and dissertations are fast becoming inefficient, cumbersome and outdated. Many theses and dissertations lie moldy in library buildings and Faculty offices, with no efficient way for researchers to access the information contained therein. Additionally, the time and costs involved in procuring copies of those works may often be unaffordable. The graduate thesis or dissertation is the first major work of scholarship by most academics and to ensure access to those works readily by others, as well as save costs, many universities and libraries are now making digitized (or electronic) versions available[1].

Devising methods and tools for disseminating research findings amongst potential users has always been an important concern in theory and practice; Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) is one of the relatively latest channels of achieving this. It was launched in the early 90s, to make possible, access to students' theses and dissertations. Building up ETDs collection in institutional repositories is easy especially in this electronic era.[2] Modern institutional repositories include e-resources, information technology (IT) personnel, and professional library staff with IT background, equipment and software. ETDs offer exceptional content of institution-generated information, save shelf space, serve more users simultaneously and provide more timely access. It can be built browsing the web according to the subject interest of particular scholarly community. Undergraduates and researchers can scan or browse through the ETD repository of an institution before undertaking any new research work which ultimately usually enhances the production of high quality scholarly works in the academic community globally and locally.

Over many years, ETDs and institutional repository communities have developed alongside [2]. The author posited that universities that were the first to mandate electronic deposit of theses and dissertations probably were not able to woo the faculty to deposit their scholarly works in an institutional repository. Also, those (that is, universities) that were forerunners in the development of repositories just only not long ago began to make compulsory ETD deposit for their graduate students. As these two communities bond and interact, there is emergence of common goals. Repositories are the logical provider of ETDs

storage and dissemination, and both communities share the goal of long-term preservation of content within the university library system. It is evident that ETDs play key role in institutional repositories to guarantee effective service to the academic community. Consequently, ETDs enlarge the creative potentials in users and permit them to communicate a better-off message by allowing video, sound, and color images to be included in their work. Furthermore, as far as academic information technology services are concerned, ETDs depositories are frequently one of the core components of institutional repositories (IRs) that has emerged in the early twenty-first century. The embedded relationships of campus ETDs programmes and institutional repositories are still solidifying and are worth careful analysis and unraveling. Thus, ETDs collection is considered as a major component of the institutional repository from its conception.

Establishing institutional repositories is a developing trend in many institutions all over the world and in Nigeria in particular; indeed many universities have keyed in or made efforts to key into it [3] Institutional repository is a network-accessible server used as a store for digital content; it centralizes the digital collection of university documents and also serves as a system for the dissemination and stewardship of the intellectual life and scholarship of the institution [4, 5]. Also, it offers an opportunity for academic libraries to collect, preserve and propagate an institution's scholarly output [6]. Other benefits derivable from ETDs to scholars and institutions include:

- Enhanced global visibility of African scholarship;
- Interoperability with other repositories;
- Agreements with publishers;
- Peer reviewing;
- Self archiving of research not published in accredited journals;
- One stop collection of an institution's research and intellectual outputs;
- Tool for assessment of researchers and academics;
- Sharing of knowledge internationally.

An institutional repository is established with the sole intention of boosting the visibility of the institution's research output by making it open access. However, notwithstanding increased research output from Nigerian universities, there is still a dearth of institutional repositories in the nation's institutions, which in turn leads to very poor access to scholars' and institutions' research output and scholarship including theses and dissertations [3].

Several factors have been identified as being obstacles to making ETDs accessible through Institutional repositories in Nigeria which include mistrust on the part of the researchers and other stakeholders especially in terms of safety of their intellectual output, plagiarism and copyright issues, lack of awareness about the existence and development of institutional repositories; little or no budget allocation to their development. Other major issues are inadequate technology infrastructure, which comprise staff constraints; fast, reliable, as well as affordable internet connection and adequate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure with limited fund. These issues can be broadly categorized under organizational culture, institution policy, motivational factors, environmental factors and finding.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs) repository as a subset of institutional repositories. The paper will discuss the concept of electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs), the originating institutions and organizations including Virginia Tech Initiative, the Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization and the United States Department of Education. ETDs form the foundation of many institutional repositories (IRs)

that manage and safeguard community assets. Institutional Repositories give their institutions both a digital library and a showcase.

Many institutions around the world have emphasized the implementation of ETDs programmes, while few countries have attempted to achieve this at the national level. Nonetheless, design and accomplishment (including maintenance) of ETDs programmes are not straightforward. The assortment of various stakeholders, standards and policies renders the design, implementation and access to ETDs a difficult and uncertain process. There is a vast set of factors that may cause an ETDs program to cease or result in feasibility and viability issues. Though ETDs programmes are very effective channels of disseminating theses and dissertations to academic communities and other users, stakeholders handling the ETDs programme need to be aware of the Critical Success Factors (CSFs) throughout the process of design and development in order to ensure the success of the programme [7]. As the name implies, CSFs are those factors important to achieving the project's mission and goals. Commonly, irrespective of the system used, the measurement of the success of ETDs programmes is based on their defined goals and objectives, coupled with the control of those factors that may predict this success. Some other success factors have been identified such as the:

- frequency of views (such as page views per year);
- coverage of ETD users (like scholars, general public, policy makers);
- usability of the portal that makes ETDs accessible determines success;
- usage of sensible strategies, suitable standards, interoperability and social issues;
- functional perspective of ETDs, for example, the provision of full text will be of great value.

Therefore, this paper will look at the roles of institutional factors in having in place effective ETDs through institutional repositories ((IRs). The paper will: be informational in nature, do extensive review of relevant literature and:

1. discuss the concept of ETDs, their relevance and importance;
2. discuss the problems associated with ETDs;
3. describe Institutional Repositories and their importance in information dissemination;
4. describe the challenges associated with institutional repositories in developing countries with specific emphasis on the Nigerian context;
5. discuss institutional factors such as institutional policy, institutional culture, funding, motivational factors and environmental factors as factors that can affect ETDs dissemination through IR.

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