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Management and Utilization of Theses and Dissertations in Michael Okpara University Library: A Digital Approach

Abstract

Response to management and utilization of theses and dissertations in Michael Okpara University Library Umudike, a method of converting rare materials from their print format to electronic format. This literature based opinion piece looks into digital approach as a way of making traditional management and utilization of theses and dissertations issues and none issues via digital approach. Certain factors are necessary for a successful digitization project in a university library. These have been discussed and they include: policy enactment, policy approval, planning budgeting and monitoring, training of staff, and funding. The benefits and potential benefits of digitalization of theses and dissertations have also been highlighted. The paper concludes with some recommendations which include that MOUAU library would need to enact a digital policy approved by appropriate authorities with a well planned budget that is monitored. Also a good digital training attention should be given to its human resource with a fundamental attention to the overall funding of the project.

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1.1 Introduction

The fast depletion of Theses and Dissertations (TDs) as one of the library resources is of global concern in libraries. Thus the continuous search for the most efficient way of their management and utilization to reduce lots of space deficiencies, cost deficiencies, access and availability deficiencies which amounts to reduction in their utility in various university libraries in Nigeria is imperative. Theses and dissertations falls within the first generation information sources in every university library. Their fundamental goals are to meet the requirements of a degree, proving that one has mastered the skills necessary to succeed in

ones field, while at the same time, making an original contribution to that field. They are the first expression of maturity in mastery of a field.

According to Anunobi (2002) the production of an original work in the form of projects and theses/ dissertation is usually a standard requirement from undergraduate or postgraduate degree awarded by universities. Theses and dissertations are useful primary sources of information, to which may be attributed to the acceleration of research. This is because they consists a form of academic literature which a scholar cannot ignore, therefore they are useful sources of information on new research with extensive

bibliography that are also useful to students, researchers and institution as a whole.

For most institutions, they are the best instrumentality by which to measure student's preparedness, ambition and accomplishment. But despite the tremendous benefits of this special and rare material, its management and utilisation in most university libraries has been grossly inadequate. Therefore the objective of this work is therefore to examine the management and utilization of theses and dissertations and to identify proper measures required for efficient management and utilization in university libraries in Nigeria.

2.1 Review of Related Literature

2.2 Digitization: A Conceptual View

Digitization has been variously defined. Sonaike (2005) referred to it as the transformation of the acid paper and endangered library materials and printed pages into high quality images. According to Fabunmi (2008) it is the art of converting the content of a document from hard copy into machine readable format. This process basically involves taking a physical object and essentially making an electronic photograph of it. Digitization is the creation of digital objects from physical, analogue originals by means of a scanner, camera or other electronic device. It is undertaken as part of a process that includes:

- Selection
- Assessment, including of needs
- Prioritization
- Preparation of originals for digitization
- Metadata collection and creation
- Digitization and creation of data collections
- Submission of digital resources to delivery systems and repositories.

In digitization process, an image of the physical object is captured using a scanner or

digital camera and converted to digital format that can be stored electronically and accessed via a computer. Witten, et al (2003) describes digitization process as the act of taking traditional library materials that are in form of books and papers and converting them to the electronic form where they can be stored and manipulated by a computer. Digitization in libraries is evolutionary as it transcends from traditional approach to modern approach in libraries.

2.3 Management and Utilization of Theses and Dissertations: Traditional Approach

In MOUAU library, the Acquisition Department library receives TDS from colleges, records, accessions, stamps and shifts them to the Cataloguing Department. In the Cataloguing Department, bibliographic information about the TDS are recorded and catalogued and sent to the Reference Department of the library for further processing. In the Reference Department, the TDS are indexed and abstracted with 3 by 5 catalogue cards via an in house scheme to enhance access to them. They are further arranged according to the type of degree, discipline, year of award of the degree, in alphabetical sequence of subject and kept in a closed access area on shelves to avoid theft and plagiarism among student and researchers. Access to them is usually done manually via those library catalogue cards usually stored or preserved in a cabinet with bibliographic information about each of them.

As a matter of access, users must visit the library before having access to them. External users who may have a research need must also visit the library with an introductory letter from institutions concern before access could be allowed to their use. During access, users are expected to copy out the bibliographic information of titles needed according to the Reference Department format and then place the copied title in the

request box where a library officer on duty will retrieve the main work from the closed access room. Students are equally expected to statistically record the date, time, and title of the work before usage. Usage is seriously limited to short term loan services within the Department. Although traditionally, the manual method of managing and utilizing theses and dissertations has been in existence and useful since the inception of the library and the university, several issues have evolved and combined to force a rethink and uneasiness in the heart of librarians and staff on management and utilization of theses and dissertations. Such issues include:

- Regular increase in the number of hardcopies of these materials received from colleges with increase burden of space issue.
- Old, fading, fragility, brittleness level of most of the theses and dissertations due to regular handling and usage by users.
- Traditional methodology of management and utilization by librarians, library officers, users.
- None remote access to theses and dissertations, which does not also allow efficient and direct user-friendly presentation of information being search.
- None global visibility of theses virgin works.

University libraries world over are now trying to come out of these traditional woods moving beyond their custodial role by the introduction of ICT in their libraries to relieve their libraries and their patrons much stress that accompany these manual and traditional issues method of management and utilization of these research materials. Information and communication technology which is a conflate of information and technology has come to create a change in the way these and

dissertations are being managed and utilized globally. According to Ugwuanyi and Ezema (2009) information and communication technology (ICT) brought about a paradigm shift on library and information science profession. The application in library operations and daily services library works and services is recently acknowledged as the best way that could be used to assist researchers in line with quality and efficient library services to solve their literature needs for effective research activity.

The application of ICTs to library operations presently also helps in the provision of efficient reference and information services in libraries. Information which are bibliographically borne are now emerging as “digital borne” or digitized for the sake of convenient use and longevity. As stated by Ezema (2010), ICT has created a digital atmosphere for information acquisition, processing and dissemination. The new realm has led to the development of enhanced access and preservation technique called digitization. Fabunmi (2006) in his view affirms that the manual system of searching for information in library does not permit multiple use of the same material by different library users unlike the online library services. It is time consuming, hence the need to exploit the advantages of the digitization.

2.4 The Benefits of Digitization

The benefits attached to digitization are numerous. Fabunmi (2006) have also identified justifications for digitization of theses and dissertations in university libraries. According to them:

- Digitization makes the invisible library resources visible.
- Improves multi-user access to resources at a given time, irrespective of location.
- Allows users to search for collections rapidly and comprehensively from

- anywhere at any time.
- Removes the access barrier inherent in traditional libraries.

Digitalization has been identified as one of the major trends changing society and business in the near and long term future. The potential benefits of digitalization are high; already by digitizing information-intensive processes, costs can be cut by up to 90 percent and turnaround times improved by several orders of magnitude. In addition, replacing paper and manual processes with software allows businesses to automatically collect data that can be mined to better understand process performance, cost drivers, and causes of risk. Real-time reports and dashboards on digital-process performance permit managers to address problems before they become critical (Markovitch and Willmott, 2014). According to Sabbagh et al. (2012) digitalization offers incremental economic growth; countries at the most advanced stage of digitalization derive 20 percent more in economic benefits than those at the initial stage. Digitalization has a proven impact on reducing unemployment, improving quality of life, and boosting citizen access to public services. Finally, digitalization allows governments to operate with greater transparency and efficiency (Parviainen, Kääriäinen, Tihinen and Teppola 2017). Even though the importance of digitalization is well known, theses and dissertations in Michael Okpara University library has been saddled with lots of management and access barriers. According to Stewart (2008) access mechanisms are very important predictors of information resources satisfaction, effectiveness and relevance of any university library. Therefore, tangible library resource like theses and dissertations in university libraries should be given a digital attention that will enhance their relevance, availability and effective use electronically.

Consequently, the concept of electronic theses and dissertations is clear. According to Eaton (1996) quoted in Ezema (2010), E-theses have been openly discussed by key players in the present world wide ETDS movement since 1997 and even accepted by some universities since 1994. Many universities are still hesitant in adopting e-theses and dissertations especially in the developing countries. Nonetheless, at the last count the number of universities registered with the Networked Digital Library of these and dissertations (NLTD) that actively mandate electronic submission total led 56, from a diverse background including north American and European institutes but also universities from South America, Asia and Africa (Adanu, 2004). Networked digital library of theses and dissertations (NDLTD) is a global organization programme. At the regional level, we also have ETDS programme known as Database of African Theses and Dissertations (DATAD). Okyi (2008) cited in Eke (2010) explained that DATAD project is an initiative of the Association of African universities (AAU) and sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and AAU.

The AAU is an international non-governmental organization which was set up in 1967 by Universities in Africa with a number of objectives which included, collecting, classifying and disseminating of information on higher education and research, particularly in Africa. The goals of DATAD are to create capacity in African universities for collection, and management of theses and dissertations electronically and approving visibility through improving access to the work of African scholars in and outside the continent. Libraries in Nigeria such as University of Jos, Obafemi Awolowo university Ile-Ife, University of Nigeria Nsukka to mention but a few have also joined their counterparts both in developed world

and developing world to digitized their theses and dissertations with their success stories and challenges.

3.1 Success Factors Toward Achieving Electronic Theses & Dissertations in University

Libraries

Certain factors are necessary for a successful digitization project in a university library. These include: policy enactment, policy approval, planning budgeting and monitoring, training of staff, and funding. These identified factors are briefly explained as follows:

Policy Enactment

It is necessary for a library that is considering digitization of its theses and dissertation to enact a policy that will stand as a guiding statement for the project. According to Fabunmi (2006), the policy should contain the goals of the digitization project. He further explains that good goal setting is important for any new initiative and digitization is no exception. Categories of users that will be having access to the collections and how it will be used after digitization need to be specified in the policy. The intellectual property right issues need to be discoursed. Eke (2011) added that efforts to formulate digital libraries will be seriously delayed in the absence of a common, responsible framework of rights, permissions, and restrictions that acknowledges the mutual needs of rights-holders and users of materials in digital libraries. Intellectual property seems to be the major challenge of building a digital library she added. In University of Nigeria Nsukka, same subject of intellectual property has caused most academic staff to withhold their publications from being scanned and uploaded to the university website. This situation, therefore calls for goal-setting regarding the issue of digitization of the

university resources. The materials also deserve some sort of security in terms of restrictions to users. Not every part of the work should be viewed or downloaded by users on the Internet. The university authority, academic staff, digitization personnel need to sit down and brainstorm on the issue of intellectual property rights and ways of preserving the resources already stored on the university database.

Policy Approval

Policy need to be approved by appropriate authorities before project implementation. For instance the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture management should as a matter of leadership role give an approval to the digitization of theses and dissertation before the commencement of digitization process.

Planning, Budgeting, and Monitoring:

Planning, budgeting and monitoring are very essential stage. It is desirous to set up a planning committee that will draw the plan and budget for the digitization project. Thus should include categories (a) salaries wages and benefits (likely to be about 50% of the project cost); (b) staff training, (c) equipment and supplies; (d) services, contracts and legal fees, (e) overhead and indirect cost (including office and workplace; and (g) contingency (setting aside 10% of the total project budget of unexpected expenses Fabumi (2006).

Training of Staff

Human beings very often, are resistant to change. It is therefore necessary for a library who wants to go into digitization to organize digitization training programme for its members. Akpan (1992) stated that,

"an untrained man in the modern world is a quack, he knows only the hows of a thing, he has no idea of their whys. Hence, if there is any trouble anywhere, breakdown in a ledger, all he can do, is to fumble and patch up

the trouble anyhow, leading to a more serious breakdown or a greater confusion. Really, there is no place for an untrained worker or even the intelligent amateur in these days of special work."

Hence, training needs to be organized especially in the areas of computer literacy networking, software usage access and use of theses and dissertations. This is to enable staff move towards achieving the general goal of digitization process.

Funding

The issue of funding is also very essential in this process. Although the issue of funding has time immemorial been a very big issue in libraries and besides, digitization projects is usually cost effective and very often requires large amount of fund. This may absolutely stand as a barrier in achievement of digitization projects. For instance, funds are required to get a good office place, payment to ICT consultants and payment of legal fees. Be this as it may, Funds are basically necessary in the insurance of quality and right equipment (hardware and software) and appropriate technologies.

The essentiality of funds in ICT projects cannot be overlooked. This so because it is the only sure way of ensuring standard in terms of digitization of library content, no digitization process can thrive in any library without money in its bid to ensure quality management and digital accessibility. Hence, funding issue is fundamental in every digitization process. University libraries who have engaged in digitization of their theses and dissertations do collaborate with some agencies for fund and these agencies can also provide a model for the starting of digitization process. For instance, University of Ghana with the help of Caregie Corporation of New York has overcome the barrier of lack of fund, and is currently in the process of automating

its library process. Digitization of theses and dissertations at the university libraries of Jos and the Obafemi Awolowo University, under the AAU-DATAD programme, provided a model for ABU to start digitizing its post-graduate theses and dissertations (Eke, 2011).

Conclusion/Recommendation

In summary, MOUAU library has a pathway to follow for her theses and dissertations to be digitized. From the forgoing success factors itemized and discussed, MOUAU library would need to enact a digital policy approved by appropriate authorities with a well planned budget that is monitored. Also, a good digital training attention should be given to its human resource with a fundamental attention to the overall funding of the project. Digitization holds great potentials in management and use of theses and dissertation in university libraries especially, in this electronic age. It is therefore recommended that the MOUAU library should key to the contemporary trend. The rich research output TDS kept under lock and keys can be of remedies to problems in the society. The furtherance of knowledge will recover new frontiers and the image of MOUAU as an institution would be made visible if her TDS are digitized and made available online. It is therefore recommended that the library management liaise with the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike to table this need and thus key into the success factors outlined in this study to achieve digitization of its theses and dissertation.

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