E-Theses and Dissertations in Zambia: A Case Study of Two Universities in Kabwe

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Abstract

This study investigates the successes and challenges in the implementation of Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) at Kwame Nkrumah and Mulungushi universities in Kabwe district, Zambia. Employing a qualitative research approach, data were collected from four purposively selected key informants using structured interview guides. These informants were personnel from the e-resources departments of the university libraries. The findings reveal that both institutions share common attributes, such as the establishment of institutional repositories and the successful initial implementation of ETDs. However, the study identifies significant challenges including staff resistance to depositing their dissertations into institutional repositories, a lack of expertise in configuring the institutional repository platforms, and intermittent network connectivity. Thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the data. The study concludes that while some progress has been made in the implementation of ETDs, the current state at the two institutions has not yet reached the desired level. To address these issues, the study recommends the following: enhanced training programs for staff on the importance and use of ETDs, improved technical support and infrastructure for repository management, and strategies to foster a culture of compliance and participation among academic staff.

Introduction

In the digital age, the management and dissemination of academic research have undergone significant transformations, with Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) playing a pivotal role in this shift. This study, conducted by Jive Lubbungu and Chewe Mumba, focuses on the implementation of ETDs at Kwame Nkrumah University and Mulungushi University in Kabwe district, Zambia. By exploring the successes and challenges faced by these institutions, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of ETD integration and to offer recommendations for improvement.

An ETD is an openly-accessible electronic version of a thesis or dissertation that is stored mainly in the Institutional Repository (IR)

According to Chisale (2024), the integration of technology, open-source initiatives, and the evolving paradigm of intellectual property rights has fostered the development of ETDs projects which has seen the establishment of the Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD) which is an international organization dedicated to advancing the creation, accessibility, and preservation of ETDs from academic institutions globally. NDLTD actively supports electronic publishing and advocates for open access to scholarly content to facilitate global knowledge sharing by encouraging the adoption, creation, utilization, dissemination, and preservation of ETDs

Implementation of ETDs comes with numerous successes which include: increased accessibility and visibility through global reach and searchability, Cost Savings which reduces physical space and printing costs, Preservation and Longevity of digital documents, Enhanced Research Quality which allows for the inclusion of multimedia elements and incorporating

hyperlinks and interactive elements thereby enhancing user experience, Administrative efficiency and Environmental benefits. Barua N (2006) in his study indicates that, Scholarly materials like theses and dissertations can now be submitted in electronic form so that they can be distributed to a wider group of users not limited within the library building. Information technology (IT) has given us new opportunities to explore with. This technology however has not gathered the right pace in our part of the world due to various issues. These issues relate to the technology, necessary modification in workflows, hardware and software requirements, copyright, accessibility, security and issues bothering students, reviewers and the faculty members of higher educational institutions and Universities. Hence, the paper discussed these issues with a favorable attitude towards electronic theses and dissertations and gives a brief account on its implementation.The study further discussed that ETD will enhance its accessibility and usage with a concern on how to provide enhanced accessibility with satisfaction to students, faculty members, administration and library staff.

In another study done by Rasuli B. (2019), the study identifies the Critical Success Factors (CSFs) that are crucial for the implementation of ETD programs based on a structured review of the existing literature about ETDs. The study compares and classifies the identified CSFs by conceptualizing a generic framework comprising five generic dimensions which include: Management and Organization, Participation, Content, Technology and Service. The study therefore indicates that Institutional Repositories (IRs) play a key role in digital scholarship and are recognized as an essential infrastructure for academic research. Therefore, the successful implementation of ETDs has a direct implication for national and international research and education.

Neil E. & Gary M. (2006) in their study state that, In Africa, the Association of African Universities implemented the Database of African Theses and Dissertations (DATAD) pilot project from Februaury 2000 to September, 2003. The project aimed to expose the research output of higher education institutions in Africa to a global research community. ETD's have the ability to improve the publicity of research output by an institution's staff and students. The DATAD pilot project has been one of the successes of ETD's.

A study done by Tise E. R (2005) explored institutional, social and policy issues with regards to University of Western Cape (UWC) experience with ETD's and challenges and innovations in South Africa institutions states that, although some institutions have successfully implemented ETD's including Database of African Theses and Dissertations(DATAD) project, there are still many challenges and more institutions plan to embark on ETD implementation in South Africa and a national initiative is underway.

Purpose of the Present Study

In the present study we examined the successes and challenges involved in the implementation of Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) at two universities in Kabwe district, Zambia: Kwame Nkrumah University and Mulungushi University. By focusing on the operational realities within these institutions, the study seeks to provide insights into the current state of ETD integration. Specifically, it aims to identify both the achievements, such as the establishment of institutional repositories, and the obstacles, including staff resistance and technical limitations. The ultimate goal is to offer recommendations for improving the ETD process in these institutions to enhance the accessibility, visibility, and preservation of academic research output.

Method

Sample

To investigate the successes and challenges in the implementation of Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) at Kwame Nkrumah and Mulungushi universities in Kabwe district, Zambia, this study employed a qualitative research approach. Data collection was conducted through structured interviews with four purposively selected key informants. These informants were personnel from the e-resources departments of the university libraries, chosen for their direct involvement and expertise in the management of ETDs. The structured interview guides were designed to elicit detailed information about the establishment of institutional repositories, the implementation process, and the challenges encountered. By focusing on these informants, the study aimed to gain in-depth insights into the operational realities and technical issues faced during the ETD implementation. The collected data were then subjected to thematic analysis to identify common patterns and themes, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the current state and areas needing improvement in the ETD processes at these institutions

Instrument

To explore the successes and challenges of implementing Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) at Kwame Nkrumah University and Mulungushi University, data collection relied on structured interviews. Four purposively selected key informants from the e-resources departments of the universities' libraries provided in-depth information. The interview guides consisted of open-ended questions designed to gather comprehensive insights into the management and technical processes involved in establishing institutional repositories. These guides focused on operational challenges, successes, and recommendations for improving ETD

implementation. The structured nature of the interviews ensured consistency while allowing flexibility for the informants to share detailed experiences.

The structured interviews facilitated the collection of qualitative data, capturing both the technical and human factors influencing ETD integration at the two institutions. The use of interviews allowed the researchers to engage directly with individuals responsible for the day-to-day management of ETDs, offering a firsthand account of the successes and barriers encountered. The data gathered through these interviews provided rich, detailed descriptions that were later subjected to thematic analysis to uncover key themes and patterns related to the implementation of ETDs.

Design

The research design for this study adopts a case study design, focusing on the exploration of successes and challenges in the implementation of Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) at Kwame Nkrumah University and Mulungushi University in Zambia. The study utilized purposive sampling to select key informants from the e-resources departments of the university libraries. These individuals were chosen due to their direct involvement in and knowledge of ETD management processes, making them well-suited to provide in-depth insights into the operational and technical aspects of the system. Structured interviews were employed as the primary data collection method to capture detailed and context-specific information from each informant, with the aim of understanding the institutional experiences related to ETD implementation.

To analyze the collected data, a thematic analysis was conducted. This method allowed the researchers to identify and categorize recurring patterns and themes related to the successes and challenges of ETD systems within the two universities. The analysis focused on key themes such as the establishment and maintenance of institutional repositories, technical difficulties related to system configuration, and resistance from staff in depositing their work. By organizing the data in this way, the study was able to provide a comprehensive view of both the achievements and shortcomings of ETD implementation, ultimately offering insights into areas needing improvement and strategies for future development

Results

The preliminary results of this study highlight both the achievements and ongoing challenges in the implementation of Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) at Kwame Nkrumah and Mulungushi universities in Kabwe district, Zambia. Both institutions have successfully established institutional repositories and initiated the integration of ETDs, marking significant progress in the digital management of academic research. However, several critical challenges have been identified that impede the full realization of ETD benefits. These include resistance from staff to deposit their dissertations into the repositories, a notable lack of technical expertise required for configuring and maintaining the repository platforms, and issues with intermittent network connectivity that disrupt access and usage. Despite the initial successes, these obstacles indicate that the current state of ETD implementation has not yet reached its optimal potential. The study underscores the need for targeted interventions such as enhanced training programs for staff, improved technical support and infrastructure, and

strategic efforts to cultivate a culture of compliance and active participation among academic staff.

Discussion

Implications for the implementation of ETD's

The study set out to investigate the successes and challenges in the implementation of Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) at Kwame Nkrumah and Mulungushi universities in Kabwe district in Zambia. The findings indicate that both institutions scored some successes in the implementation of ETDs such as visibility of institutional output, increased accessibility and visibility and that platforms were up and running, a confirmation of Neil and Gary (2006)' observation that ETDs have the ability to improve the publicity of research output by an institution's staff and students. Such achievements point to a greater visibility to the outside world as one Key Informant remarked,*"…letting the world know and have a feel of the research work produced from Kwame Nkrumah University is the biggest success ever.*" Further, the confirmation by both institutions of having IRs is an indicated of progress made promoting digital scholarship at the two Universities. This finding resonates well with Rasuli (2019) who argues that Institutional repositories play a critical role in digital scholarship and essential for academic research. Hence, any failure to address the bottlenecks in the implementation of ETDs negatively affects digital scholarship.

Implementation of ETDs in the two institutions is, however, clogged by some challenges such as Documents though peer reviewed by supervisors are not checked for plagiarism, server malfunction, erratic funding, lack of standardization, and many others as submitted by one key informant: "*Human resistance to change from the traditional way of doing things to*

adapting the new version of handling documents, fear of allowing us as a library to have access to their documents especially in soft copy most students do exhibit some doubt, majority of staff are not ready to give up their work for free, technological challenges with service providers." These challenges are not unique to the two institutions as Tise E.R. (2005)' study reveals that despite successful implementation of ETDs in some South African institutions, there are still many challenges. The findings on the challenges in the two instittutions calls for strategic investment in key areas such as Cloud-based solution to host the platform, investing in technical infrastructure, vigorous sensitisation of both students and staff by making them understand that putting their work out there is a way of marketing and putting their institution on the world map, proper policy, and the wilingness by institutions to have data public.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the implementation of Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) at Kwame Nkrumah and Mulungushi universities in Kabwe district, Zambia, has seen promising beginnings with the establishment of institutional repositories and initial successes. However, significant challenges remain, including resistance from staff to deposit their work, a lack of technical expertise, and unreliable network connectivity. These obstacles have prevented the full potential of ETDs from being realized. To overcome these hurdles and enhance the implementation process, it is crucial to invest in comprehensive training programs for staff, bolster technical support and infrastructure, and develop strategies to promote a culture of compliance and active participation among academic staff. By addressing these issues, the universities can achieve a more effective and sustainable ETD system, ultimately contributing to the broader dissemination and accessibility of academic research in Zambia.

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