

THE BALME LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF GHANA: DATAD PROJECT REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The DATAD project was initiated by the project for Information Access and Connectivity, (PIAC) at a planning meeting in Nairobi, Kenya in January 1998. A three-year pilot phase was started in February 2000. This phase involves eleven (11) institutions including the University of Ghana where the project is being implemented at the Balme Library.

Objectives of DATAD include the following:

- ?? To contribute towards the creation of an environment conducive for research and publication in African universities and the region as a whole.
- ?? To create the capacity in African universities for collection, management and dissemination of theses and dissertation electronically.
- ?? To improve accessibility to the work of African scholars both within and outside the continent.
- ?? To facilitate the development of relevant copyright procedures and regulations which will promote the protection of the intellectual property rights of African University researchers.
- ?? To provide support for other AAU programmes, which aim at capacity building in the area of universities and networking of institutions having access to a central source of information.

The Balme Library of the University of Ghana accepted to participate in the DATAD project on 3rd July 2000. However, it was not until somewhere in late October 2001 that the hardware and software were installed. From that time to the end of that year was used to train staff who would work on the project.

Initially, 3 persons were implementing the project: two professional librarians and one administrative staff. The project was implemented in the Cataloguing Department, where theses and dissertations are processed. After evaluating the work involved in the project, it was decided that the number of people working on the project be increased. There are currently 5 persons working on the project, with different responsibilities.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Balme Library now has about 3,000 theses. Out of this total there are about 1,081, which were produced using the manual typewriter. These groups of theses pose all sorts of problems. These theses among other things have abstracts, which cannot be scanned. In effect all abstracts of this nature are typed, thereby putting a lot of stress on the staff.

While it takes about 10 minutes to edit an “ordinary” abstract of a record, it takes about 30 minutes to one hour to edit an abstract, which contains scientific and mathematical symbols. If the abstract is about three or more pages the problem is compounded. Also, if the scanner, which is not “intelligent”, does not scan all symbols, then you have to spend additional time in looking for these symbols to insert.

At the Balme Library, theses and dissertations are kept in an air-conditioned basement of the library thereby providing the materials with the required environment to be preserved for posterity. In addition to that, it is a closed access and only the library staff have access to the theses. A library client can only make a request for the thesis at the reference desk.

We have a clear-cut policy on copyright and we never depart from this policy. The policy does not also allow photocopying without the permission of the author. The following is our copyright policy:

- (a) Balme Library theses are available for consultation in the library. They are not normally available for loan and they are never lent out to individuals.
- (b) All who consult a thesis must not copy or quote from it without the consent of the author and of this university (University of Ghana).
- (c) Any copying or quotation permitted should be duly acknowledged.

In spite of all the problems we have had with data entry, the Balme Library now has 1,650 edited records and is still adding on to it. In spite of the fact that the Balme Library has all these records in the database, they are not yet accessible to the wider university community due to certain “technical problems”. It is, however, hoped that the records would soon be accessible to the public.

IMPACT

Frankly speaking since the database is not accessible to the university community, impact cannot be measured. However, it must be pointed out that the impact on the Balme Library in general and the implementing unit, the cataloguing department, has been tremendous. This is so because there had been discussions sometime ago to create a database of our theses. But due to one problem or the other, the discussions and plans never came to fruition. Thanks to the DATAD project it has made our dreams come true. In fact it has helped us to process many more theses than we would have done under normal circumstances. It would go a long way to enhance the status of the library. There have been no requests for full text because the database is not yet accessible to the public. However under the manual system, the full text of a thesis can be requested for by depositing one’s identity card. Again, our copyright policy is adhered to.

GENERAL EVALUATION

The following are some observations:

(a) *The Objectives*

As far as the objectives of DATAD are concerned, we have observed that two of them have been achieved. These are:

- ?? To create the capacity in African universities for collection, management and dissemination of theses and dissertation electronically.
- ?? To improve accessibility to the work of African scholars both within and outside the continent.

Without doubt, DATAD has created the capacity in the universities involved in the project to collect, manage, and disseminate theses and dissertations electronically. Added to that when the online database is launched it would improve accessibility to the work of African scholars in Africa.

(b) *Workshops*

The first workshop was a success and it is hoped the second one would be more successful than the first one.

(c) *Management*

As regards management, we would say that the project has been managed well and any problem that surfaces is dealt with immediately. Quality control is also rigorously applied and one can say with confidence that the records in the database are of the highest quality.

(d) *The Equipment and Software*

The Dell Computers, flatbed scanner and LaserJet printer needed to run the DATAD project at the Balme Library are robust and still in good condition. The Procite and Reference Web Poster softwares are also functioning well. However, it must be pointed out that the scanner sometimes does not perform well. An intelligent scanner would have done the job better. Since the project started the anti-virus software installed has never been updated nor has any provision been made for its update. We suggest that anti-virus software should be purchased for the project as soon as possible.

(e) *IT Support*

IT support for the project within our institution has been satisfactory. However, we still have some rough edges to straighten out. We hope that as soon as this is done, we would not have problems with IT support.

OTHER COMMENTS

There are some theses without abstracts in our holding. Since we cannot write abstracts for all of them, we sometimes identify some of the authors and they willingly write abstracts for us. There is one particular thesis, which was written entirely in a Ghanaian language, and was of interest to us but had no abstract. Fortunately, the writer works with the university so we got her to write the abstract for us.

Having worked with this project for almost one and a half years, we have noticed that a field is needed in the database for “table of contents”. The table of contents field will have the scanned

table of contents of the thesis and this will enable anyone accessing the database to know exactly where in the thesis the information sought is.

On sustainability, one wonders if the Procite software has a life span and if it does, how often should it be upgraded. We should be told some of these things so that we can be better prepared.

CONCLUSION

The project has come at the right time. It has really helped to create a database of our theses, something that would have taken so much time and money to implement. We hope that more institutions are added to the project because they need the help we are receiving from the project.

