

The State of Acquisition, Organization and Use of Open Access Information Resources in Cameroon University Libraries: The Case of the University of Buea and University of Yaounde I Libraries.

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Introduction:

Cameroon's Higher Education landscape had a very positive overhaul in 1992 with the so called higher education reforms that saw the creation of five more universities that went functional in may 1993 in addition to the then lone University of Yaoundé. The University of Yaoundé had long outgrown itself in terms of the number of students, the available resources, and infrastructure and staff situation.

The five other universities that saw the light of day include the University of Buea created in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, the University of Ngaoundere with a Francophone tradition and the Universities of Douala, Dschang, and Yaoundé II with bilingual (English and French) traditions. Douala, Dschang, Ngaoundere and Buea were created by transforming the former University centers of the same names.

The Mother University, Yaoundé I inherited most of the infrastructures of the former University of Yaoundé such that at its commissioning it did not face the teething problems of inadequate infrastructures like libraries, classrooms, office space as well as other issues like staffing, equipment, Information and communication technology facilities etc. that were acutely faced by the newly commissioned universities.

It is in this light that this paper attempts to examine the state of acquisition, organization and use of the electronic information resources in general and open access information resources in particular in the libraries of the University of Buea and the University of Yaoundé I. The choice of Buea and Yaoundé I libraries was not haphazard in that while Buea has the merit of a comparatively new University Library, that of Yaoundé I is the oldest University Library in the country.

The two Universities vary from each other in the number of programmes offered as well as the various infrastructures and resources available for staff and students, as far as meeting the missions of the two institutions is concerned. The University of Buea is as earlier mentioned conceived in the Anglo-Saxon tradition while the University of Yaoundé I has a bilingual and bi-cultural tradition of French and English with the French cultural influence more dominant.

The perennial problem of lack of adequate funding for state Universities in Cameroon has been highlighted by the fact that the six state universities depend largely on annual subventions from government that at times take a long time in coming. This state of

funding of state universities has invariably had a direct impact on the funding of university libraries in Cameroon. These libraries mostly depend on donor support through donation of books and other information resources.

In the face of this financial predicament, all Cameroonian University Libraries are gradually becoming aware of the vital role that open access information resources could play in their bid to deliver effective information services to their users, in the face of the present financial situation. This has led University libraries like that of Buea and Yaoundé I to explore ways of harnessing open access information resources for the benefit of their clients.

A brief history of the University of Buea Library:

The University of Buea as earlier mentioned was created from the ashes of the former Buea University Center which had as the main establishment, the Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters (ASTI). The University of Buea in May 1993 therefore inherited the modest Documentation Unit of the Advance School of Translators and Interpreters with about 3000 monographs, some 50 serial titles all in print and about 60 audio and video cassettes mainly in the areas of language teaching, linguistics, translation and interpretation. The ASTI Documentation Unit could only seat 50 users at any one time.

When the University of Buea was commissioned in May 1993 it had an intake of over 1500 students with no corresponding change in accommodation infrastructures including the Library. For three years the former ASTI Documentation Unit served as the infant University of Buea Library while the UB administration looked for ways and means of constructing a viable Library building.

In 1994 the University of Buea Development Fund (UBDEF) allocated some funds for the construction of the first phase of the Library comprising the Central Core and East wing of a projected three-winged building. When completed in September 1996, this first phase provided sitting space for over 175 users at any one time as well as about 800 square meters of stacking for print information resources. For over ten years now the first phase of the Central Library has proven to be inadequate in terms of reading and stacking space given the exponential increase in enrolment, from 1500 students in 1993 to over 12000 students in 2006/2007.

It is for this reason and thanks to the amelioration of the financial situation of state universities that the University of Buea administration decided to complete the Central Library by constructing the North and West wings of the star-shaped building whose completion is envisaged for the end of August 2007. The two new wings will provide stacking and reading space as well as a virtual library with an estimated 50 computer work stations connected to the Internet for optimal exploitation of the electronic information resources. There are also plans to extend library services to faculties and schools as infrastructures become available, beginning with the Medical School Library.

This will further relieve space problems as the University continues to grow in terms of student enrolment and faculty numbers.

A Brief History of the University of Yaoundé I Library:

As earlier said, the University of Yaoundé was the lone full-fledged university in Cameroon before the 1992 Higher Education reforms that saw the decentralization of this University and the creation of five more state universities. The University of Yaoundé I then saw the light of day. It inherited most of the building infrastructures of the defunct University of Yaoundé including the ultra-modern university library building that had just been completed with a capacity of 5000 square meters of space. This building that meets international standards in terms of space and equipment can sit over 1000 users at any one time with stacking space for over 200,000 volumes. The University of Yaoundé I also inherited the information resources (over 80000 volumes that hitherto belonged to the then University of Yaoundé unlike other state university libraries that had to start from scratch.

Since 1993, the information resources of the University of Yaoundé I have continued to grow and now stand at about 120,000 volumes in print.

Although there has also been an increase in the enrolment of students from about 14000 in 1993 to 25000 in 2006/2007, the University of Yaoundé I Library is still under-exploited in terms of stacking space according to a senior staff of the Library. This Library however provides only closed access to print information resources. It however has a Multi-media Resource Center with 60 functional computer work stations.

State of Information Resources in Buea and Yaoundé I

The University of Buea in 1993, inherited about some 3000 volumes of print monographs, 50 serial titles and 60 audio-visual information resources from the defunct Buea University Center. From 1993 to 2007, the University of Buea Library can now boast of over 80000 volumes both of processed monographs and serials either acquired through purchase or donations. These are divided into the Open stacks collection, the Reserved collection, the Camerooniana Collection, University of Buea Theses and Dissertations collection and the Serials Collection. These resources continue to grow but this growth has been mitigated in the past by lack of stacking space that has in recent years slowed down the expansion of these collections as there are many processed volumes yet to be shelved.

The University of Buea has since 2001 been having access to some electronic information resources either on CD-ROM or online. These include access to the African Digital Library (ADL) at <http://www.netlibrary.com> , the Health Internetwork for Access to Research Initiative (HINARI) at <http://www.healthinternetwork.org> , the Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture (AGORA) Initiative at <http://www.aginternetwork.org> , the Network: Towards Unity For Health (TUFH) at <http://www.the-network.org>, African Journals Online at <http://www.inasp.info/ajol>, the World Bank Electronic Libraries at <http://www.worldbank.dlibraries.org> , Codesria

publications at <http://www.codesria.org/publications.htm>, Science and Development Network (SciDevNet) information resources at <http://www.scidev.net>. The University of Buea Library has since 2005 also been providing its users with other information on open access resources like the Directory of Open Access Journals at <http://www.doaj.org> as well as other open access repositories or archives worldwide like the directory of Open Access Repositories (OpenDOAR), using search engines like Google Scholar at <http://scholar.google.com/scholar/>, OAIster at <http://oaister.umd.umich.edu/o/oaister/>, ARC at <http://arc.cs.odu.edu/>, e-prints UK at <http://eprints-uk.rnd.ac.uk>, the PKP Open Archives Harvester at <http://pkp.ubc.ca/pkp> etc.

The University of Yaoundé I has over 120.000 volumes of both monographs and serials that are in closed stacks as earlier stated, there is a general book collection, a serials collection, theses and dissertations etc. However the major differences between Yaoundé I and the University of Buea (UB) is that the bulk of the information resources available in Yaoundé I are in the French Language while those in Buea are in English even though both Libraries have pockets of monographs and serials in English and French respectively. The University of Yaoundé I also has access to some online electronic Information Resources like HINARI, AGORA and the Database of African Theses and Dissertations (DATAD). There are also some CD-ROMs from the Agence Universitaires de la Francophonie that are also free of charge.

Organization and Use of Open Access Information Resources:

Open access information resources are increasingly becoming available to libraries worldwide thanks to the Open access Initiative (Suber, 2005). The open Access resources that have been defined in the Budapest Initiative and the Berlin Declaration as well as by other agencies have increasingly become available to Cameroon University libraries as indicated above. The organization and effective use of these open access information resources are predicated on the availability of information and communication technologies like computers and Internet access. The University of Buea Library was connected to the Internet via Optical Fiber Cable in 2003/2004 to the University of Buea Information Technology Center, ITC, but the connections only worked for a short while due to inadequate bandwidth. The problem of bandwidth is gradually being addressed as more finances have been recently provided to pay for it. The Central Library was provided with 25 internet nodes extendable to 50 while the Annex Library had 5 functional nodes extendable to 15.

For now, there are only six standby computers in the Library for consultation of electronic resources on CD-ROM. This has made the organization and use of electronic resources in general cumbersome and mitigated given the lack of Internet access and adequate equipment for their exploitation. However the Media and Systems Service of the University of Buea Library has compiled a directory of electronic information resources including open access resources available to the University of Buea Community and this is available on CD-ROM and in bound copies for consultation by users who are then given user identities and passwords as well as counseling on the licensing agreements and access procedures.

These users, especially faculty members and postgraduate students doing research continue to visit the Library for information on open access information resources including the HINARI, AGORA, ADL, AJOL DOAJ, OpenDOAR etc. Though Faculty members are aware of the availability of information on Open Access Resources in the Library, mostly students (60% of users) make regular use of the Media and Systems Service for information and user education on the open access resources. The faculty members prefer to get passwords and do their online searches themselves such that it is difficult to evaluate the extent of use as well as how productive or effective the use of these open access resources are.

However some lecturers contacted were of the opinion that the open access resources are increasingly becoming very useful for their academic and research work but their main problem is access to Internet connection in their offices.

The University of Yaoundé I Library on its part has had a functional Multi- media Resources Centre with 50 computers connected. These computers are used both for offline and online access to electronic information resources available to the Library. The Multi-media Resources Centre of the University of Yaoundé I Library is supposed to be the hub of the recently created Centre Interuniversitaires des Ressources Documentaires (CIRD) loosely translated as the Center for Interuniversity Information or Documentary Resources.

However, the Library's Internet connection via Very Small Aperture Terminal (V-SAT) since 2003 has left a lot to be desired as there have been problems of bandwidth that have continued to plague the connection. According to the Director of this Library, the lack of adequate finances to pay for bandwidth has been the major problem. Also the rampant electric current outages caused by intermittent electricity supply have also been to blame as these have often caused damage on electronic circuitry of the system and have often led to long delays in repairs.

A Senior Librarian at the University of Yaoundé I Library was of the opinion that the Library would have been optimally exploiting open access information resources both from within and without the University but for the poor Internet access in the Library. He also indicated that such initiatives like HINARI and AGORA that are available to Cameroon University Libraries free of charge can not be well exploited at the University of Yaoundé I Main Library without adequate Internet access.

The other issue facing Yaoundé I and Buea is that of automation. Both Libraries are yet to be fully automated. This has mitigated the advantage automation could have in promoting the use of electronic resources in general and open access resources in particular.

There is also a problem of human resources, especially trained library personnel to exploit available Open Access Information Resources for users of these libraries. The University of Buea and Yaoundé I libraries have just a few staff who can effectively use information and communication technologies in information literacy.

These problems of infrastructure, equipment, connectivity and training have somehow made the acquisition, organization and use of open access information resources slow in Cameroonian University Libraries in the main and the Universities of Buea and Yaoundé I libraries in particular.

Prospects:

While the state of use of open access information resources is fast gaining ground in African University libraries, the state of affairs in Cameroon's two prominent university libraries still leaves a lot to be desired. However, there are prospects that in the near future things may improve drastically given the increase awareness of university administrators and faculty members of the growing importance of open access information resources and scholarly communications to the academic and scientific community worldwide.

There have been some positive moves in the past two years or so to consolidate the acquisition and organization for use of information resources in Cameroon's state universities with electronic resources both paid-for and open access at the core of this new policy. The Minister of Higher Education recently signed texts creating two structures that will go a long way in ameliorating the acquisition organization and use of electronic information resources in Cameroon university libraries. The first Ministerial text (2006) creates the "Centre Interuniversitaire des Ressources Documentaires (CIRD)" or the Interuniversity Documentary Resources Center with the headquarters in the University of Yaoundé I Main Library. This center has as its main objective to support the acquisition, production, distribution and promotion of the use of information resources by the national university and scientific community. It also has as its mission to contribute in the capacity building in higher education through the modernization and amelioration of the conditions of university libraries and the promotion of cooperation between national universities through better access to scientific and technical information.

The Interuniversity Information Resources Center (CIRD) though at a nascent stage will go a long way in ameliorating not only the quantity of information resources available to Cameroon's university and scientific community but will if well implemented act as a synergy for the upgrading of the levels of university libraries and their resources such that they meet-up with modern international norms.

Secondly, the Ministry of Higher Education also signed another Ministerial Text (2005) creating the "Centre interuniversitaires des technologies de l'information et de la Communication (CITI)" or the Interuniversity Information and Communication Technologies Center that will develop and overhaul the use of Information and Communication Technologies in Cameroon's Higher education landscape. This Center shall collaborate with computer and multimedia centers of universities to encourage and ameliorate the mastering and use of information and communication technologies. The importance of these two structures lies in the fact that they will contribute immensely in

improving the state of university libraries including the universities of Buea and Yaoundé I libraries in terms of Information and Communication Technologies and Internet connectivity.

Internet connectivity and access is also getting better, especially with the recent innovations by three of Cameroon's cellular telephony companies: Mobile Telephone Network (MTN) Cameroon, at <http://www.mtncameroon.net/services/internet.html>, Orange Cameroon at <http://www.orange.cm>, and Cameroon Telecommunications (CAMTEL) at <http://www.camtel.cm>. These three companies have upgraded their networks to provide broadband Internet connectivity via mobile and or fixed phones at relatively cheap rates. This is a major amelioration of Internet connectivity from two years back when most Universities and their libraries as well as users mostly depended on Internet Service Providers (ISP's) via V-SAT or fixed telephone lines or cybercafés at very high prices per hour. This therefore opens more vistas of access to the Internet by Faculty members, Students and Librarians who can afford personal computers and mobile phones services from the three mobile telephony networks.

The professionals of state university libraries have also not been idle as far as ameliorating the acquisition and organization for easy access of information resources is concerned. The fact that open access information resources are becoming increasingly available especially through cooperative acquisition has led to the formation of library consortia worldwide. In this vein the Cameroonian university library professionals decided to solicit for assistance from the Electronic Information for Libraries Network (eIfI.net) to set up a consortium of higher education and research libraries in Cameroon, to take advantage of the open access initiative. EIfI.net responded by organizing a seminar on library consortium formation in Cameroon in May 2005. Two experts, Ms. Monica Segbert and Emilija Banyonyte were sent as facilitators. University library professionals were thus invited to the seminar and at the end of it, groundwork was laid for the eventual formation of the consortium.

However due to administrative bottlenecks resulting from the constant change of higher education administrators in Cameroon, the consortium could not take-off immediately. This was mainly due to the fact that the documents sent to various Rectors and Vice-Chancellor(s) and to the Minister of Higher Education, had to be redone when these changes occurred.

In April 2006, the ad hoc committee set up to see into the creation of the Cameroon Consortium again requested for assistance for another expert from eIFL.net. This was granted and Mrs. Helena Asamoah-Hassan from Ghana came to Cameroon to mentor us on how to launch a functional consortium. After a day's working session, the basic organs of the consortium were put in place. In the months following this working session, legal authorization has been obtained and office space acquired for the consortium known as the Consortium of Cameroon University and Research Libraries (COCUREL) to go functional. The Ministries of Higher Education and Scientific Research and Innovation as well as the various heads of Higher Institutions in Cameroon have been contacted. Presently the pioneer executive committee of COCUREL is soliciting for support from donors and other stakeholders to make the consortium go operational. It is hoped that

when COCUREL goes functional many Cameroonian university libraries will make more use of open access information resources as well as engage in scholar communication using open source publishing for their scientific and scholarly publications to also become available to the global scientific community.

Another issue has been the reluctance by the scientific community in Cameroon's Higher Education landscape to embrace open access resources as well as engage in open source publishing. The first reason has been ignorance of the availability of open access resources as well as the possibility of open source scholarly communication. The next reason is the conservative nature of some scholars who still strongly believe only in the viability of print scientific and scholarly communication. This school of thought, especially the editors of the few scientific and scholarly journals in Cameroonian Universities, have been of the opinion that the publication of scientific journals in Cameroon is very expensive and there is the need to recover some cost after publication. They also believe that print journals are valued more in terms of their scientific and scholarly content than electronic journals. This issue of scholars being reluctant to embrace the use of open source for scholarly communication needs to be addressed at the level universities and the ministries of Higher Education and Scientific Research and Technical Innovation. It is necessary to empower the scholars through training and information for them to be able and willing to use open source scholarly publication especially in the area of funded research. This will go a long way in making available research findings freely accessible to the scholarly communities. It will also increase the visibility of Cameroon's scientific research output.

The next reason is that of lack of adequate infrastructure to enable the use of open access resources and to engage in open source publishing. Most of the faculty members and researchers that were approached in Buea and Yaoundé I were of the opinion that open access information resources are very necessary but expressed regrets that infrastructures like Internet access and computing facilities are not adequate thus making it very difficult to engage in the use of open access resources and open source scholarly communication. They, including librarians also expressed the need for training on the availability of these open access resources and the use of open source scholarly communication that may enable them to make their scientific publications available free of charge to the global scientific community.

In Buea for instance, the Vice-Chancellor recently set up a committee to produce a document on the management and sustenance of research in the University. The blue print of this document that was recently presented to the university community stressed the need for a comprehensive inventory of all University of Buea research and scientific findings such that these may be traced and archived for posterity. The document also indicates that all funded research at the university will henceforth be made available to the University for archiving and dissemination.

Also in this light there are plans to create a functional University of Buea Electronic Theses and Dissertation Database and Information Repository for the archiving of all Post graduate and staff research carried out at the University. This will go a long way in

making available the University of Buea's research findings easily accessible to all stakeholders.

The University of Yaoundé I Library is already a member of the Association of African Universities (AAU) Database of Theses and Dissertations (DATAD) project.

Conclusion:

From the above, it is very clear that open access information resources are gradually making in-roads into Cameroon's university libraries as seen from the universities of Buea and Yaoundé I libraries. Though open access is relatively new in these libraries it is obvious that the Librarians and faculty members are gradually appreciating the growing importance of open access information resources. Though a major set back in their use is inadequate availability of Internet access, there are prospects that when things improve especially the upgrading of internet facilities and information and communication technologies in Cameroon's higher education as projected by the Minister of Higher Education, more and more open access information resources will become available to users of Cameroon's university libraries in general and the universities of Buea and Yaoundé I libraries in particular.

There are also prospects that scholarly communication will improve with increasing availability of open source publishing that is making scholarly and scientific publications increasingly available free of charge to the academic and scientific world. It is however hoped that scholars in Africa and Cameroon in particular will become more aware of the potential of open source scholarly communication whose advantages are increasingly appreciated. The training of stakeholders including librarians, faculty members and researchers in the use of open access information resources and the open source scholarly communication will appreciably improve the acquisition, organization and use of open access information resources in Cameroon's university libraries.

It is also high time for Cameroonian Librarians, faculty members and researchers to come together and seek for ways and means of harnessing information and Communication Technologies in the use of open access information resources and open source scholarly communication.

Thank You for your kind Attention.