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Kamani Perera

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**An Evaluation of the Use of ETDs by the PhD Students in Library of  
Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS), Sri Lanka**

Kamani Perera

Librarian

Regional Centre for Strategic studies, Sri Lanka

[Kamaniperera2015@yahoo.com](mailto:Kamaniperera2015@yahoo.com), [librarian@rcss.org](mailto:librarian@rcss.org)

+94775965252

## **Introduction**

ETDs have changed traditional scenario of academic library settings. It has modified studying in education and research, but in spite of its great potential, ETDs have however to beat traditional paper based theses environment in the market. Universities, Research and Educational Institutes, Academic Libraries etc. must respond to growing presence of ETDs and ensure that users remain aware of ETD services offered by the organizations. Although, there are limitations to ETD's implementation, its application in academic sector is likely to grow over time. It is evident that ETDs can play a significant role in repositories and it may lead to a result-oriented approach by way of improving data skills of research scholars. It is, therefore, extremely important to provide accurate data sets to fulfill the information gap and at the same time supporting to accomplish their novel research by providing required ETDs in time.

## **Problem Statement**

ETD is a collaborative effort of universities/organizations to promote creating, archiving, distributing and accessing metadata. With the emergence of new information technologies a significant amount of ETD repositories became available all over the world. Research from various perspectives is going on to evaluate them. Though ETDs are playing major role in institutional repositories in academic sector, there is still a gap of awareness and accessing relevant PhD thesis for student's research purposes. This study is focused to evaluate PhD students' awareness, frequency and expectations of ETD repository at RCSS library and to eliminate those gaps, if any, to facilitate in providing effective ETDs to research scholars.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of present research was to discover the usage of ETDs by PhD students' who visit the RCSS library. In this research survey, the researcher has examined motivational factors that influence use of the ETDs. It provided an overview to the most frequently used ETDs in RCSS library repository. Such periodical evaluation helps the organization in ensuring the standard, performance, reliability, appearance, and commitment to delivery time of the required information.

## **Methodology - Data Collection**

For this research study, questionnaire was distributed among the PhD students who have registered in the RCSS library in 2014-2015. Participants have been selected through an open invitation and prior consent has taken on individual basis before sending the questionnaire. The purpose of this procedure was to evaluate as to what extent PhD students utilize the ETDs offered by the RCSS.

## **Literature Review**

ETDs are playing dynamic role in academic sector by adding value to the student's curriculum vitae while boosting their research knowledge in greater scale. This has been clearly indicated by Alemneh, *et al* (2014) and according to them ETDs are generally support students' candidature for academic degrees, enriching CVs and adding value to their professional qualifications. Thus, it is very important to maintain and promote ETDs in academic libraries where students' carry out their research and education. Perera (2015) emphasized that the library of RCSS has been used open access websites, databases to build up its ETD repository and preserved it as PDF documents according to the respective subject fields. Most of the ETDs in RCSS repository are born digital and few of them are converted to digital. Similarly, Copeland (2008) pointed out that many universities are taking efforts to promote 'open access' to develop their institutional repositories, which contain the full text of ETDs, journal articles, book chapters, conference proceedings, reports etc.

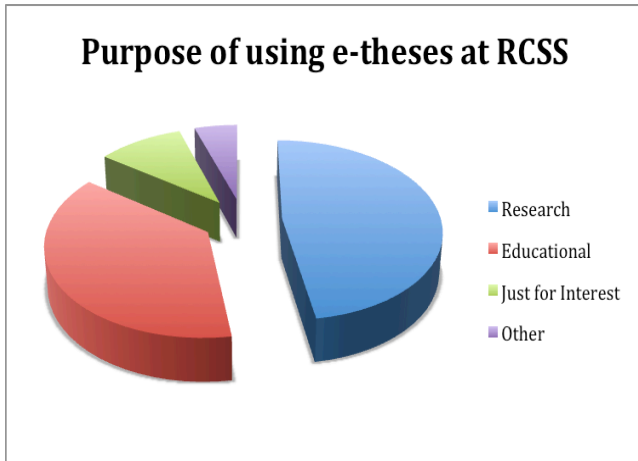
To produce scholarly research piece, it is essential to think critically and engage with existing research data according to the researcher's particular subject area. At this juncture, ETDs have become major component, which produce novel research data to the scholarly field. Fox (2004) stated that the purpose of the ETD is to prepare the next generation of scholars to function effectively as knowledge workers in the information age. Similarly, Gaur and McLean (2015) described the importance of ETDs in an academic sector. According to them, ETDs facilitate following activities for academic scholars.

- Topic identification
- Comprehensive review
- Literature review
- Currency
- Methodology/Theory Development
- Future research
- Test and measurement instruments
- Unique topic area exploration
- Writing styles
- Formatting ideas

Copeland and Penman (2004) also highlighted the benefits of ETD repositories for institutions and libraries. According to them that institutions benefit from improved access to the research findings of their staff and students. Increased levels of use of the material produced at a particular university can help to promote the research profile of the institution. In the same vein, libraries also benefit when theses and dissertations are made available in electronic format. It saves storage space, saves staff time spent retrieving and re-shelving hard-copy theses, reduces number of inter-library loan requests, easy collection of usage statistics and improve the customer satisfaction. Vijayakumar and Vijayakumar (2007) pointed out that

doctoral (PhD) theses are contribution to the world of knowledge. Further the results, conclusions and recommendations invariably have impact towards the economical and social up-liftment. In addition, the thought content also paves way to new vistas of investigation and encourage inter-disciplinary approach, which will strengthen the fabric of life styles in the society.

### Data Analysis



The research survey in 2015 has proved that the scholarly community of the RCSS has used ETD collection mainly for research and development, and educational purposes (Figure 1).

Most of the users are coming under faculty members and research scholars whom they have used ETDs for research and development while others are postgraduates and undergraduates who used ETDs for educational purposes (Perera, 2016).

Figure 1. Purpose of using e-theses at RCSS

### Goals

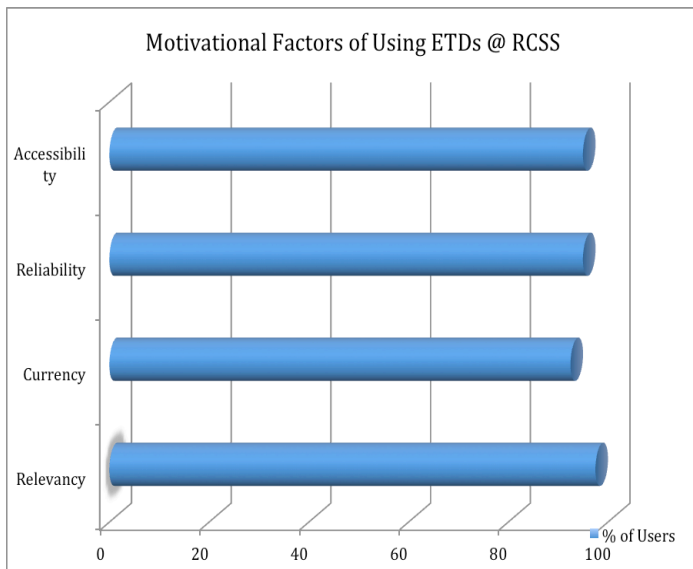


Figure 2. Motivational factors of using ETDs at RCSS

The objective of this research study was to evaluate the satisfaction level of PhD students' who are using ETDs provided by the RCSS Library. In this research survey it is found that the researchers are motivated to use the ETD repository due to their subject relevancy, reliability, accessibility and currency (Figure 2). This evaluation not only inspires more energetic ETD development environment which ultimately leads to an effective way of universal access but also endeavors for the systematic development of ETDs. Once PhD students' are familiar with the ETD technologies they tend to become critical thinkers of their own research study and will be able to produce more fruitful scholarly piece.

The series of workshops are being conducted by the Library of RCSS for the purpose of improving writing skills for research and dissertations among graduate and postgraduate

students. The students of the workshops are encouraged to make use the ETD repository at RCSS Library before they submit their research proposals to the respective universities. Plagiarized content can be easily discovered in electronic way. Therefore, the students are advised to avoid plagiarism by way of paraphrasing, summarizing and citing the original work. In this context, it is very important to cite the original work of paraphrased or summarized contents. Otherwise, it has considered as a plagiarized content. And also students are encouraged to discuss their own experience, challenges, successes and failures of their research study rather than borrowing other researchers' opinions to maintain the originality of their research study.

Schopf, Chaudiron and Jacquemin (2014) pointed out that theses and dissertations constitute the significant part of the academic grey literature produced by the universities all over the world. Similarly, Goodfellow *et al* (2012) stated that ETDs are the research outcomes of the research degree and postgraduate degree programmes. Due to the easy access of electronic format to wider audience, universities now a day have encouraged their research scholars and postgraduate students to submit their thesis and dissertations in electronic format. Suber (2012) also stated that theses and dissertations are the most useful kind of invisible scholarship and the most invisible kinds of useful scholarship. In the same vein, Cayabyab (2015) mentioned that easy submission, access, dissemination and effective cost management are the factors that make the development of ETD repositories a success stories worldwide. Similarly, Mini Devi, Gana and Sri Ram (2015) also highlighted the importance of creation of ETD repositories in libraries and information Centres. They have emphasized that usage of ETDs help to uplift the new generation in exploring the unrevealed areas of research. It eventually supports PhD scholars to produce successful research output. Lipincott and Lynch (2010) also suggested that libraries could play a broader role in graduate education by arranging for the institutional repository services, which will enhance students 'dissertation experiences'. The RCSS has already taken steps to add ETDs to its e-library since 2009. PhD students are encouraged to access the ETDs at RCSS library and to study the research topics, problem statements, research questions, objectives and methodology etc. and how to produce good research proposal avoiding plagiarism. UNESCO (2015) also pointed out that ETDs are part of the scholarly communication compendium and a critical component in any of the research life cycle. Similarly, Fox (2001) stated that access to ETD is viewed as the only resource open for those in developing countries who cannot afford to subscribe commercial database vendors; or attend international scholarly symposium and participate in inter-library (ILL) projects. It is crystal clear that ETDs are playing a dynamic role in academic libraries especially in developing countries where that get budgetary constraints to subscribe necessary databases. In this manner, scholars in the developing countries are immensely benefited from the open access ETD repositories in academic libraries.

According to Fineman (2003) ETDs support highly expressive multimedia supplements, cost effective in comparison with print theses and dissertations, activities teach students about electronic publishing and information technology thus helping them to function more effective in the information age, promote easy access to current research and improved visibility for authors. Fineman (2004) further stated that there are two types of ETDs such as 1. Convert to digital and 2. Born digital. The former one is generally digitized by the library and archives staff and to enhance the access to paper based theses and dissertations (TDs) and latter part is created by the students in the course of their research. In Sri Lanka, students generate their TDs

in electronic format for supervision stage and final stage they should submit hard copies of their TDs to the university.

## **Conclusion**

As there are growing programmes of postgraduate studies, it is very essential to maintain ETD repositories in academic libraries. Even in Sri Lanka, there are plenty of educational institutes who conduct such programmes other than the universities. Therefore, it is important to make awareness of ETD repositories by way of conducting outreach programmes, workshops etc. to provide the effective services to PhD scholars. Thus, RCSS has taken steps to conduct series of workshops on 'Skills Development for Research/Dissertation'. Postgraduates are immensely benefitted from these workshops and they are encouraged to make use ETD repository at RCSS Library. Students can investigate the existing research topics and will be able to select suitable research topic by avoiding repetition of research. On the other hand they can conduct further research on particular subject area to eliminate the gaps of that research. In this way ETDs provide proper guidance and open new window for a novel research findings. Gaur and McLean (2015) pointed out that ETDs facilitate to unleash author's creativity and setting them on a path of inventiveness that can follow them throughout the career. Similarly, Ahmed, Alreyaee and Rahman (2014) stated that ETDs play a key role in highlighting the research impact and enhancing the rank of institutions. In the same vein, they emphasized that ETDs have become a major component of institutional repositories across the continent of Asia. In RCSS Library, ETDs play a dynamic role by adding value to the existing electronic repository. Moxley (2001) stated that in future, a university's quality would be linked to its digital library of theses and dissertations. In this research study, the RCSS has proved that how the Library become a 'Research Gem' due to the scholarly visibility of its ETD repository among similar academic libraries in the region.

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