

Chapter 23

Institutional Repositories in Universities in Nigeria: Desirability and Progress

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ABSTRACT

The desire of academic institutions to link up to the virtual repository is a global phenomenon. Traditional scholarly publication through established journals characterized by peer review is being challenged by less formal net-based communication that links scholars essentially instantaneously. The contention is that universities need to preserve the benefits of the old system, in which the review process provides cohesion to a given field, while taking advantage of the speed and ease of access promised by the new media. This paper explores the Nigerian situation as it pertains to universities. The paper is basically descriptive and relies mostly on empirical evidences. It was revealed that because of the opportunities created by this new innovation, there is a burning and widespread desire to latch on this opportunity to increase the visibility of their intellectual output and productivity in the universities. The universities also face challenges in this respect which includes poor technology infrastructure, inadequate funding and lack of awareness amongst others. It is believed that if progress made so far is sustained with improvements on challenges the development, management and deployment of IRs will record tremendous success in universities in Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

To further the development of knowledge, scholars require access to relevant literature. Increasingly, this literature is interdisciplinary, global, expensive, digital, and hidden behind technical walls to comply with license restrictions. Even scholars at the richest universities in the world have difficulty accessing the specialized literature that they need, while those at the poorest barely have any access at all (Bailey, 2006). For centuries, institutional libraries and scholarly publishing was the conventional model adopted in presenting and disseminating knowledge from academic and research institutions. Whereas institutional libraries housed research outputs in the form of grey literatures, thus playing a greater role in terms of preservation than dissemination, scholarly publishing played a much greater role in terms of dissemination through scholarly journals. Over the past several decades, however, the economic, market and technological foundations that sustained this symbiotic publisher-library market relationship has begun to shift. This shift has resulted in what Berkler called the “networked information economy” which is gradually displacing the “industrial information economy” that typifies information production from about the second half of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century (Christian, 2008).

Today, knowledge is considered as a strategic resource. It is inevitable that we create, store, share and transfer information knowledge in a continuous flow and for the advancement of society. For more than a decade now, academic institutions have strategies with how to manage the collective, digital output they produce clearly due to technological advancement, it is easy to create and access digital materials (Jain and Bentley, 2008). Prior to this time, there was a scholarly communication crisis owing to high serial subscription costs and database licences, which limited access to research outputs for university students and academics (English, 2003). This prompted academic researchers and university and research centre administrators to come up with alternative forms of scholarly communication (Deby and Organ, 2009).

In order to address the above conditions institutional reposition (IR) started with the advent of the World Wide Web (WWW). In 1991 the e-print service arXiv was developed by Los Alamos physicist, Paul Gaisperg. It eventually led to the Open Archive Initiative (OAI) in which it enables IRs to operate together (Akintunde and Anjo, 2012). In June 1994, Steven Harnad a cognitive scientist at the University of Southampton in the United Kingdom (UK), wrote his “subversive proposal for electronic publishing”. In 1999, the Santa Fe Convention was held, the first incarnation of the OAI protocol for Metadata harvesting. The roots of OAI lay the development of e-print repositories (or archives), established in order to communicate the result of ongoing scholarly research prior to peer review and journal publication (Carpenter, 2003).

The momentum was further increased by a growing movement for academic journal publishing reforms in the 2000s. Events in 2001 when the E-print was developed also included the initiation of the Budapest Open Access Initiative where the term “open access” was coined and the two strategies of Green OA (self-archiving) and Gold OA (Open access publishing) were devised (Poynder, 2010) as cited by Jain (2011). In 2002 Dspace and HP and in that same year FESORA (Flexible Extensible Digital Object Repository Architecture) was developed. These softwares are used as platforms to deploy IRs. They are the programmes that provide structured data-entry points for digital resources loading to semantic relationship. Semantic relationships are further enhanced by the introduction of metadata, i.e. data about data, which increases the direct fundability of resources, rather than mere accessibility (Akintunde and Anjo, 2012). Similarly, the California Digital Library scholarship repository was developed at the beginning of 2002 in collaboration with the University of California, representing another landmark in the development of the IR and OAI (Derby and Organ, 2009).

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