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Institutional Repositories and Libraries in Nigeria: Interrogating the Nexus

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Abstract

Institutional repositories (IRs) are emerging trends in scholarly discourse among members of the academic community in Nigeria. Global practice shows that many IRs are administered by librarians in the academia. This article examines the nexus between libraries and IRs. It observed that though the emergence of IRs holds great advantage for academic institutions, many Nigerian institutions, especially universities, do not have functional IRs because of the inability of their libraries to run them. The article further identifies the digital divide, inadequate financing, the lack of ICT skills and awareness as well as copyright issues as challenges inhibiting the establishment and management of IRs in Nigeria. Recommendations are made for dealing with the identified challenges.
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Introduction

Academic institutions are regarded globally as knowledge creators, facilitators and disseminators. In recent times, institutional repositories have become major channels through which institutions carry out these functions. The need to facilitate scholarly scientific communication brought about the Open Archives Initiative (OAI) in 1999. The initiative facilitated the rise of institution-based repositories (Jones, Andrew and MacColl 2006). Over the years, publishing and disseminating the results of research electronically has led to exponential growth of scholarly literature. However, not all scholarly literature is freely available; a significant number of journals are subscription based. The continuous rise in price of essential journals and the shrinking budget of libraries have been observed as the reasons for the creation of digital repositories which is a viable and workable solution (Harnad, 2006; Odlyzko, 2006).

Lynch (2003) defined institutional repository (IR) as 'a set of services that a university offers to the members of its community for the management and dissemination of digital materials created by the institution and its community members'. It is an online archive that collects, preserves and disseminates digital copies of the scholarly output of a university community. Institutional repository could also be regarded as a digital system for capturing, preserving and creating access to the intellectual output of a research or academic community (Foster & Gibbons, 2005).

The divergent positions nevertheless, institutional repositories are electronic and internet –based platforms concerned with knowledge generation and dissemination from an academic community for the purpose of educational, socio-political and economic development (Okede and Owate, 2015). The establishment of institutional repositories is aimed at reaffirming institutional dominance over research output with a view to redefining intellectual discourse and breaking the exclusive control of journal publishers (Halder & Chandra, 2012). The content of repositories includes: journal articles, chapters in books, theses, dissertations, research data, conference proceedings and others. They could be managed with open source or commercial software. Arguably, the most popular software used for the management of repositories in Nigeria is Dspace and Eprints. Libraries are the arrow head in the creation and management of institutional repositories.

Librarians in Nigeria like their counterparts in the developed countries have also recognized digital institutional repositories as formidable means to combat rise in prices of serials. Libraries are often charged with the responsibilities of establishing and managing institutional repositories. Generally, libraries are unique in that they do not only select, organize, store and retrieve information; they also create access, protect intellectual freedom and provide direct assistance and instructions to their patrons in the use of information resources. In the 21st century, new information and communication technologies (ICTs) have revolutionized the format and style of library services. The channels for access and distribution of information and knowledge have become much more diverse. While libraries will not be replaced, they need to adapt new methodologies in order to take advantage of the new ICT tools. One important way through which libraries have risen up to this challenge is their involvement in creating and running platforms for institutional repositories.

However, establishing and operating an institutional repository (like any other ICT platform) is not without challenges. Globally, nations and institutions have to deal with barriers in order to effectively and efficiently run any ICT platform including IRs. The barriers may only differ

depending on which side of the economic and digital divide the nation or institution belongs. Universities and libraries in developing countries like Nigeria have to contend with inadequate funds, technology problems, lack of stable electricity, copyright issues and so on. Though some of these challenges have been identified in literature, not much have been written on how to deal with these barriers in relation to institutional repositories especially in Nigeria. Currently, out of the 127 Universities in the country, only thirteen of them have operational and viable repositories (Ifijeh, 2014).

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