

Awareness and Use of Open Access (OA) Initiatives in Ensuring Free Access to Information Among Librarians in Academic Libraries in Nigeria

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Abstract: *This study was carried out to investigate the Awareness and Use of Open Access Initiatives in Ensuring Free Access to Information in Academic Libraries in Nigeria. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. Five research objectives and five research questions were formulated to guide the study. The population of this study comprised librarians in academic libraries in South-South, Nigeria. Data for the study was collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher and was administered online using Google forms. 62 forms were filled and submitted from the professional platforms. The study used frequency counts and percentages to analyze the data. The findings revealed that librarians in academic libraries in South-South, Nigeria understand OA initiatives to be free availability of online information resources and promotion of free access to scholarly literature. Findings also revealed that Institutional repository, Open access publishing, open access journals and Directory of Open Access Journals are the initiatives that librarians are mostly aware of. The study also found that the OA initiatives mostly utilized by Librarians included open access journals, Institutional repository and DOAJ. Further findings also showed that most librarians felt that the relevance of OA initiatives included: It enables researchers' access relevant materials, wider accessibility, Information is unrestricted, increased author visibility and Information is available 24/7. Lack of awareness, lack of relevant policies and technophobia were the major challenges of OA initiatives. This implies that librarians are mostly aware of OA initiatives and also utilize them. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that efforts should be made by librarians in keeping aware of OA initiatives and utilize them properly for access to information.*

Keywords: open access, initiatives, utilization, academic libraries, librarians

INTRODUCTION

Open access (OA) initiatives are playing an increasingly important role in academic libraries, aiming to make scholarly research freely available to anyone with an internet connection. This movement aligns with libraries' missions of promoting knowledge dissemination and equitable access to information. The Budapest Open Access (2002) initiative defines open access as “free availability on the internet, permitting users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full text of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself”. According to Yang and Li (2015), open access information resources are laden with the benefits of providing researchers with access to relevant and up-to-date digital information, wherever they are located in a relatively easier, faster, cheaper and desired format. Other benefits of OA initiatives include:

Wider Dissemination: Research reaches a broader audience, including researchers in developing countries and the general public.

Increased Citations: Studies show openly accessible articles receive more citations, boosting author impact.

Transparency and Collaboration: Open access fosters open science practices and facilitates collaboration among researchers.

Cost-Effectiveness: OA can help reduce overall library subscription costs, freeing up resources for other priorities.

Suber's (2013) definition shows that Open access goes beyond scholarly publications and the following characteristics were pointed out:

- ❖ It is free availability of scholarly publication
- ❖ It is free of copyright and licensing restrictions
- ❖ Materials are available online or on the internet
- ❖ Materials are usually full text or bibliographic information
- ❖ Materials can be accessed by anybody without any discrimination
- ❖ Open Access contents can be in any format from texts and data to software, audio, video, and multi-media, scholarly articles and their preprints”.

The major initiatives towards open access are Open Access journals. They allow access to read, download, copy, distribute and print articles and other informational materials (Dhanavandan & Tamizhchelvan, 2016).

Open Access is simply the free online availability of digital contents, scholarly journal articles, research results which authors publish without expectation of payment and is based on an ethical

argument that research funded by the public should be available to the public. OA operates within the legal framework and authors own the original copyrights to their work. Authors can transfer the rights to publishers to post the work on the web or else can retain the rights to post their work on the archives (Das & Chowdhury, 2019).

Open Access (OA) initiative is a revolutionary movement that aims to ensure the widest possible distribution of research by removing obstacles related to permission and cost and promoting free online access to scholarly publications. Open Access (OA) initiatives emerged as a revolutionary movement that promotes free access to scholarly publications over the Internet, removes the price and permission barriers and ensures the widest possible dissemination of research. These initiatives include:

- **Institutional Repositories:** Universities and colleges can host open access repositories for faculty research, student theses, and other scholarly works.
- **Open Access Journals:** Libraries can advocate for and support open access journals by subscribing to them or encouraging faculty to publish in them.
- **Green OA:** Authors can deposit their accepted manuscripts in institutional repositories, even if published in subscription journals.
- **Gold OA:** Authors pay article processing charges (APCs) to publish their work in open access journals.
- **Open Educational Resources (OERs):** Libraries can collect and promote openly licensed teaching materials like textbooks, modules, and multimedia resources.
- **Examples of successful OA initiatives:**
- **Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ):** Indexes high-quality, peer-reviewed open access journals across all disciplines.
- **Public Library of Science (PLOS):** A leading publisher of open access journals in science and medicine.
- **OpenAIRE:** A European project that tracks and analyzes open access publications.
- **SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition):** An advocacy organization promoting equitable access to scholarly research.

OA exists where there is free, immediate and unrestricted availability of digital content. Open Access to information and knowledge not only enables digital inclusion of common citizens, particularly under privileged communities, but also bridges social divides (Keisham & Sophiarani, 2009).

Fernandez, (2006) described Open access initiatives based on interviews with information professionals responsible for creation and maintenance of online research repositories in India as open access journals, e-print archives and e-theses repositories.

Librarians are the driving force behind libraries, they are information specialist who are supposed to facilitate access to information and information resources over the networks at the global level. Academic

librarians have an essential role in managing collections and delivering information services to their users. It is the Librarians that is required to build library content; organize collections to optimize irretrievability; ensure reliable and equitable access to information sources; and implement reference and information services to meet the needs of the library's various users. (Maesoroh and Genoni, 2009).

Academic libraries are libraries attached to tertiary institutions and they are expected to play a crucial role in supporting their roles in teaching, research and learning. They are expected to render specialized services and provide information resources in all formats to meet the information needs of their users. Rao (2011) opined that libraries are a hub of knowledge and hence a central and integral part of academic life. Academic institutions are now using libraries as the core part of the institution that can make a powerful change in society. (Vilgi and George, 2017).

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the awareness and use of open access initiatives in academic libraries in Nigeria. The specific objectives include:

- i. Determine the understanding of OA initiatives among academic librarians in Nigeria.
- ii. To ascertain the awareness of OA initiatives among academic librarians in Nigeria.
- iii. To find out the OA initiatives that academic librarians utilize.
- iv. To identify the views of the perceived relevance of OA initiatives among academic librarians in Nigeria.
- v. To find out the challenges encountered by Librarians in implementing OA initiatives.

Research Questions

- i. What is the understanding of OA initiatives among academic librarians in Nigeria?
- ii. Which of the OA initiatives are academic librarians in Nigeria aware of?
- iii. What are the OA initiatives academic librarians in Nigeria utilize?
- iv. What is the relevance of use of OA initiatives among academic librarians in Nigeria?
- v. What are the factors militating against the use of OA initiatives among academic librarians in Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Waithaka and Onyancha (2021) investigated the awareness and use of open access (OA) channels for scholarly publishing by researchers at selected universities in Kenya. A sample of 341 faculty members, from three public universities, was selected for the study. A questionnaire was used as the main data collection instrument. The findings revealed that there is a considerably high level of awareness among the researchers; librarians were the main channel with regard to creating awareness; the OA channels that are more frequently used by researchers are OA journals, OA institutional repositories and OA e-books; the researchers mostly published/disseminated theses and dissertations, conference proceedings and workshop/seminar presentations through OA channels; and searching and accessing research articles, developing research proposals and

formulating research problems were among the main reasons why researchers used open access channels. There are several reasons why researchers sometimes do not use OA channels for research. The study makes several recommendations for the adoption and effective use of OA channels in the selected universities and beyond.

Emezie, Ezeri and Ewulo (2023) investigated perception of librarians on their roles in using open access databases to improve scholarship. Descriptive survey design was used for the study while questionnaire was employed to collect data from 53 professional librarians at two federal universities in the eastern and western part of Nigeria. Findings from the survey reveal that librarians need to collaborate with faculties to develop institutional repositories and, raise awareness of open access databases in the university community among others.

Open Access operates within the legal framework and owns the original copyrights for their work. Authors can transfer the rights to publishers to post the work on the web or else can retain the rights post their work on the archives. This article talks about the influence of open access in the present era. The initiatives on the Indian side towards open access has been defined with the table showing various repositories. Then the role played by Librarians towards the open access movement has been discussed (Das & Chowdhury, 2019).

Hansson and Johannesson (2013) reported on a study of academic librarians' views of their work and possibilities regarding support for researchers' publishing. Institutional repositories and Open Access are areas being dealt with in particular. Methods used are highly qualitative; data was gathered at two Swedish university libraries over a six-month period through focus group interview sessions and personal logs by informants. Findings indicate that attitudes are often in collision with practicalities in the daily work in libraries. Even though they have a high degree of knowledge and awareness of scholarly publication patterns, librarians often feel insecure in the approach of researchers. There is a felt redirection in the focus of academic librarianship, from pedagogical information seeking tasks towards a more active publication support, a change which also includes a regained prominence for new forms of bibliographical work. Although there are some challenges, proactive attitudes among librarians are felt as being important in developing further support for researchers' publishing.

Powdwal, (2017) explores the actions librarians in Mumbai's institute libraries have done to adopt open access. It also notes the role that librarians have assumed in advocacy. It follows the evolution of open access (OA) and discusses initiatives being made in India and elsewhere to use OA in academic communication.

Oyedipe et al. (2017) found that majority of lecturers preferred open access “mode of publishing their research articles and other works”. In the same study, “lecturers’ main purpose of using Open

Access was for research conduct (40) (74.1%); general knowledge update (22) (40.7%); updating knowledge in my discipline (20) (37.0%) and forming lecture notes for students 18 (33.3%)”.

A survey was conducted of 507 researchers from the developing world and connected to INASP's Author AID project to ascertain experiences and attitudes to OA publishing. The survey revealed problems for the researchers in gaining access to research literature in the first place. There was a very positive attitude to OA research and OA journals, but when selecting a journal in which to publish, OA was seen as a much less important criterion than factors relating to international reputation. Overall, a majority of respondents had published in an OA journal and most of these had paid an article processing charge. Knowledge and use of self-archiving via repositories varied, and only around 20% had deposited their research in an institutional repository. The study also examined attitudes to copyright, revealing most respondents had heard of Creative commons licenses and was positive about the sharing of research for educational use and dissemination, but there was unease about research being used for commercial purposes. Respondents revealed a surprisingly positive stance towards openly sharing research data, although many revealed that they would need further guidance on how to do so. The survey also revealed that the majority had received emails from so called “predatory” publishers and that a small minority had published in them (Nobes & Harris, 2023).

Transformation occurs in Librarians’ professional profile due to scientific and technological advancements. The 21st century librarians are creating added knowledge to make themselves relevant so as to be visible and competent in their field of specialization. These fields include; knowledge mining and extraction, e-content management, e-publishing, digital preservation management, knowledge management among others. In India poor access to international journals and the low visibility of research papers are the major problems facing Indian researchers. OA is viewed as a solution to remedy this problem (Keisham & Sophiarani, 2009). According to Varadharajalu, (2016), librarians face new responsibilities which include the following: understanding copyright issues, developing subject based portals, setting policies and workflows for e-content management and repository operations etc.

Online journals are considered beneficial to researchers across the globe, however, research into awareness and use of online journals has been largely overshadowed by the whole gamut of electronic resources such as e-books, e-theses, and other electronic materials, it was found that use is still a major challenge, which is rooted in a lack of awareness for the developing world in two ways: it provides information about online journals adoption in Nigeria, where little research has been done thus far, and it provides information about the practices of postgraduate students in public universities, a population area where little research has been done (Edewor, 2022).

Emezie, Ezeri and Ewulo (2023) identified various factors that could hinder librarians from effectively discharging their roles. Some of which include administrative bottlenecks, poor internet

facilities and lack of navigational skills. The study recommends acquisition of necessary knowledge and skills to enable librarians add value to their services and remain at the frontline of information provision.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the descriptive survey design to investigate the Awareness and Use of Open Access Initiatives in Ensuring Free Access to Information in Academic Libraries in the six federal and seven state universities in South South, Nigeria. The population of this study included 248 librarians in libraries and library schools in South-South, Nigeria, out of these, 62 responses were received. The method of data analysis used included frequency counts, simple percentages (%) and tables.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Analyses of Research Questions

Research Question 1: What is the understanding of OA initiatives among academic librarians in Nigeria?

Table 1: Respondents' rating of the understanding of OA initiatives among academic librarians in Nigeria

S/N	Indicate your perception on your understanding of Open access initiatives.	Yes		No	
		F	%	F	%
1.	Free availability of online information resources.	44	71	18	29
2.	Promotion of free access to scholarly literature.	48	77.4	14	22.6
3.	Creation of online repositories.	32	51.6	30	48.4
4.	Maintaining of online research repositories.	32	51.6	30	48.4
5.	Distribution of research educational materials online	34	54.8	28	45.2
6.	Removal of price barrier.	30	48.4	32	51.6
7.	Removal of permission barrier	30	48.4	32	51.6
8.	Promoting of researchers' visibility	34	54.8	28	45.2

From Table 1 above on librarians' understanding of OA initiatives, it was revealed that the responses by the respondents showed that free availability of online information resources had 44 (71%), promotion of free access to scholarly literature had 48 (77.4%), creation of online

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repositories had 32 (51.6%), maintaining of online research repositories had 32 (51.6%), Distribution of research educational materials online 34 (54.8%), removal of price barrier 30 (48.4%), removal of permission barrier had 30 (48.4%), promoting of researchers' visibility 34 (54.8%).

Research Question 2: Which of the OA initiatives are academic librarians in Nigeria aware of?

Table 2: Respondents' rating of OA initiatives academic librarians in Nigeria aware of.

S/N	ITEM Indicate which OA initiatives you are aware of.	Yes		No	
		F	%	F	%
1.	Open Access Publishing	40	64.5	22	35.5
2.	Open educational resources (OER)	38	61.3	24	38.7
3.	Institutional Repository (IR)	54	87.1	8	12.9
4.	Open Access Books	38	61.3	24	38.7
5.	Open Access Courseware (e.g. Coursera, MOOC).	32	51.6	30	48.4
6.	Open Access Journals	48	77.4	14	22.6
7.	Open Access Library Management System	32	51.6	30	48.4
8.	Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)	42	67.7	20	32.3
9.	Unpaywall	6	9.7	56	90.3
10.	Public Library of Science (PLOS)	18	29	44	61

From Table 2 on OA initiatives that librarians are aware of, it was revealed from the responses by the respondents that Open Access Publishing had 40 (64.5%), open educational resources (OER) had 38 (61.3%), Institutional Repository (IR) had 54 (87.1%), open access books had 38 (61.3%), open access courseware (e.g. Coursera, MOOC) had 32 (51.6%), open access journals had 48 (77.4%), open access library management system had 32 (51.6%), Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) had 42 (67.7%) Unpaywall had 6 (9.7%), Public Library of Science (PLOS) had 18 (29%).

Research Question 3: Which of these OA initiatives do academic librarians in Nigeria utilize?

Table 3: Respondents' rating of OA initiatives academic librarians in Nigeria utilize

S/N	Indicate which of the OA initiatives you utilize	YES		NO	
		F	%	F	%
1.	Open Access Publishing	34	54.8	24	45.2
2.	Open educational resources (OER)	30	48.4	32	51.6
3.	Institutional Repository (IR)	42	67.7	20	32.3
4.	Open Access Books	40	64.5	22	35.5
5.	Open Access Courseware (e.g. Coursera, MOOC).	24	38.7	38	61.3
6.	Open Access Journals	52	83.9	10	16.1
7.	Open Access Library Management System	24	38.7	38	61.3
8.	Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)	44	71	18	29
9.	Unpaywall	2	3.2	60	96.8
10.	Public Library of Science (PLOS)	14	22.6	48	77.4

From Table 3 on OA initiatives Librarians' utilize, it was revealed that the responses by the respondents showed that Open Access Publishing had 34 (54.8%), Open educational resources (OER) had 30 (48.4%), Institutional Repository (IR) had 42 (67.7%) Open Access Books had 40 (64.5%), Open Access Courseware (e.g. Coursera, MOOC) had 24 (38.7%), Open Access Journals had 52 (83.9%) Open Access Library Management System had 24 (38.7%), Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) had 44 (71%), Unpaywall had 2 (3.2%), Public Library of Science (PLOS) had 14 (22.6%).

Research Question 4: What is the perception of the relevance of use of OA initiatives among academic librarians in Nigeria?

Table 4: Respondents' rating of the relevance of OA initiatives among academic librarians in Nigeria.

S/N	Which of these do you agree are the relevance of OA initiatives	YES		NO	
		F	%	F	%
1.	It helps to democratize knowledge	38	61.3	24	38.7
2.	It enables researchers access relevant materials	58	93.5	4	6.5
3.	Information is unrestricted	48	77.4	14	22.6
4.	Information is available 24/7	48	77.4	14	22.6
5.	Wider accessibility	52	83.9	10	16.1
6.	Cost saving	42	67.7	20	32.3
7.	Interdisciplinary collaboration	38	61.3	24	38.7
8.	Increased author visibility	50	80.6	12	19.4

From table 4 on Librarians perception of the relevance of OA initiatives, it was revealed that the responses by the respondents showed the following: It helps to democratize knowledge had 38 (61.3%), It enables researchers access relevant materials had 58 (93.5%), Information is unrestricted had 48 (77.4%), Information is available 24/7 had 48 (77.4%), Wider accessibility had 52 (83.9%), Cost saving had 42 (67.7%), Interdisciplinary collaboration had 38 (61.3%), Increased author visibility had 50 (80.6%).

Research Question 5: What are the factors militating against the use of OA initiatives among academic librarians in Nigeria?

Table 5: Respondents' rating of the factors militating against OA initiatives among academic librarians in Nigeria

S/N	ITEM Factors militating against OA initiatives among academic librarians in Nigeria.	Agree		Not Agree	
		F	%	F	%
1.	Lack of funding	38	61.3	24	38.7
2.	Lack of awareness	48	77.4	14	22.6
3.	Lack of relevant policies	42	67.7	20	32.3
4.	Technophobia	40	64.5	22	35.5
5.	Apathy among authors and publishers	28	45.2	34	44.8
6.	Lack of quality control	38	61.3	24	38.7
7.	Proliferation of OA initiatives.	36	58.1	26	41.9

From table 5, on factors militating against OA initiatives it was revealed that the responses from the respondents showed that Lack of funding had 38 (61.3%), Lack of awareness had 48 (77.4%),

Lack of relevant policies had 42 (67.7%), Technophobia had 40 (64.5%). Apathy among authors and publishers had 28 (58.1%), Lack of quality control had 38 (61.3%), while Proliferation of OA initiatives had (36 58.1%).

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

Data analysis in research question one revealed that most librarians understand that OA initiative to be free availability of online information resources and promotion of free access to scholarly literature. This is in line with Fernandez (2006) that described Open access initiatives based on interviews with information professionals responsible for creation and maintenance of online research repositories in India as open access journals, e-print archives and e-theses repositories.

Result analysis on research question two showed Institutional repository, Open access publishing, open access journals and DOAJ are the initiatives that librarians are mostly aware of while unpaywall and PLOS were those with the least awareness. This is in line with the study by Odiachi, and Obinyan (2020) which found out that all the lecturers in faculty of basic medical sciences in Ambrose Alli University, Edo State, Nigeria were aware of open access resources.

Result analysis on research question three showed that the OA initiatives mostly utilized by Librarians included open access journals, Institutional repository and DOAJ. The initiatives least utilised were Unpaywall and PLOS. This is in line with findings from Waithaka and Onyancha (2021) which revealed that the OA channels that are more frequently used by researchers are OA journals, OA institutional repositories and OA e-books; the researchers' mostly published/disseminated theses and dissertations, conference proceedings and workshop/seminar presentations through OA channels.

Results for research question four showed that most librarians felt that the relevance of OA initiatives included: It enables researchers' access relevant materials, wider accessibility, Information is unrestricted, increased author visibility and Information is available 24/7. This is in line with the conviction by Oyedipe, Adekunmisi and Akinbode (2017) that revealed that "lecturers perceived open access publishing and publication as being beneficial and so used them to satisfy their various needs of information". Also reported is that wider availability and accessibility to information took prominence, followed by to prevent duplication of research efforts, increase authors visibility on the web, timely publication and completion of research/projects.

According to result analysis on Research question five most librarians saw the major factors militating against OA initiatives to include: lack of awareness, lack of relevant policies and technophobia. This agrees with the findings of Odiachi and Obinyan (2020) that factors militating against use of open access resources are proliferation of open access resources, authenticity of information and lack of quality control.

CONCLUSION

OA initiatives have democratized access to research, benefitting the academic community. The study provides an insight into the Awareness and Use of Open Access Initiatives in Ensuring Free Access to Information in Academic Libraries in Nigeria. The study population comprised of librarians in academic libraries in Nigeria. Open access resources have great and diverse benefits for the academic community and their awareness and efficient use need to be promoted among academic community. The level of awareness among the respondents under study shows that the resources are of tremendous use to the librarians. Major challenges include proliferation of open access resources, authenticity of information and lack of quality control.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

Librarians and other stakeholders should collaborate to raise awareness about OA initiatives benefits and best practices.

Common standards for OA publishing such as licensing (e.g. creative commons) can improve interoperability and access.

Librarians also need to be proactive in their duty of promoting information literacy among their community of users and training of academics (lecturers) on how to identify genuine information resources in open access platform and the various formats they appeared.

Governments, institutions, and funding agencies should allocate more resources to support OA initiatives.

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