

# Institutional Repository as a Catalyst for Enhanced University Visibility: The case of Obafemi Awolowo University

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Nigeria has a great number of universities and research institutes who produces high volume of scholarly work which is mostly not visible to information users because of the absence, reluctance and value placed on institutional repository. This paper seeks to bring to the forefront the benefits and opportunities IR offers scholars, researchers, institutions and the nation at large. The paper also examines in depth the purpose and importance of creating a university publication unit in the library, stating the different types of materials that can be acquired and organized in the section. Issues facing the digitization of publications and research outputs in Obafemi Awolowo University were addressed so that university libraries can learn and excel in establishing their own university publication unit and institutional repository. Recommendations for librarians, university community, management and the government were stated.

**Approach:** The paper reviewed literature to examine the importance of having institutional repository and publication unit in the library. The paper also revealed extensively different information resources accessible for researchers and information users.

**Findings:** The paper showed that research output from Institutional repository have a key role in information gatherings which is essential in decision making and policy making for national development.

**Originality/Value:** The paper provided valuable insight into the benefits of awareness programs in achieving a successful and beneficial institutional repository.

**Keywords:** Institutional repository, Publications, Productivity, visibility Accessibility, Utilization.

## Introduction

Every university is interested in enhancing her global visibility. This is because visibility is one of the avenues by which universities are ranked academically. Visibility provides opportunities for the world to assess the quality of a university's activities in the areas of teaching, learning and research. These activities by the university consequently result in intellectual outputs in the form of scholarly publications and other documents that emanate from the university. These publications/documents include: peer reviewed journal articles, theses and dissertations, inaugural lectures, seminars, conference proceedings, technical reports,

lecture notes/course materials among others. The contents of these publications/documents in one way or the other contribute to the body of knowledge. However, for these publications to be beneficial to the university beyond the point of publishing or production, they have to be collected and organized in such a way that will enhance their accessibility. The library plays a central role in collecting, organizing, storing and disseminating the university's publications.

The university library supports the teaching learning and research of the university. Hence, libraries provide within their building a unit where these resources are kept so that interested users can physically

access them. However, because libraries are moving from their traditional mode of operations (where access to information resources are within the walls of the building) to a mode where library's collections can be accessed remotely by users, they are now adopting platforms that would allow their collections to be accessed by users from any location in the world, without necessarily being physically present in the library. One platform that allows information access to publications/documents from any location in the world as well as enhancing the visibility of a university is an Institutional Repository (IR).

Institutional repository according to Velmurugan (2010) is a modern concept that captures and makes available the institutional research output and other relevant documents to the users by way of digitizing the output". IR is a platform for digitally archiving, collecting, preserving and disseminating the intellectual output of a university. Alfa Network Babel Library (2007) defined IR as "an electronic archive of the scientific and scholarly output of an institution, stored in digital format, where search and recovery are allowed for national or international use". Ifijeh (2020) also defined an institutional repository as an archive for collecting, preserving, and disseminating digital copies of the intellectual output of an institution. Okede (2015) further stated that 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. Institutional repositories are usually administered by libraries (Izuagbe, 2018). Libraries have increasing and important role to play in information dissemination and management of IR.

A university publication unit is the soul of a university campus which helps management, faculties and departments meet the administrative, legal, financial and

historical needs of the university (Mohammed, 2013). It is not common in Nigerian university libraries to have a unit in the library created for university records, documents, faculty papers, inaugural lectures, and so on. The creation and proper management of institutional document and information materials is central to the success of the university teaching, learning, research and administrative activities. It is an avenue through which tertiary institutions of learning can increase access to the academic outputs of their scholars and researchers (Chukwueke, 2020). Hence, this paper examines how university's visibility and accessibility to information can be improved through institutional repository with particular reference to Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) library, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria.

### **Why OAU IR**

Obafemi Awolowo University is a federal university in Nigeria previously known as University of Ife established 1962. It has over 30,000 students with 13 faculties, 2 colleges and over 60 departments (<https://oauife.edu.ng/about-oau/history>). Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library is the main library for Obafemi Awolowo University with several sections and units, the newly created unit, OAU publication unit houses documents on internal publications of the university. OAU being an academic institution involves in activities that turn out publications and valuable documents regularly, hence, the need for these publications and documents to be harnessed for the benefit of the university community. OAU publication unit was introduced into the library setup for the purpose of having one section in the library where all publications coming out of the university can be acquired, organized and made available for users.

Institutional publication unit is not common in most university libraries; it is highly important for academic libraries to start looking for ways to inculcate it in their library setup. The library provides access to

inaugural lectures, faculty lectures, workshop materials, university magazines and conference proceedings. Other information material includes postgraduate theses, convocation brochures and university calendars, university handbooks, magazines and so on.

In order to have a digitized version of the OAU's institutional publications, the publication unit of the OAU library works in collaboration with the ICT section to digitize the publications/documents into the OAU's institutional repository. For instance past inaugural lectures of OAU from inception till date have been scanned and uploaded into the IR. The collections in the publication unit can only be accessed when users are physically present; and one document can only be accessed by one person at a time, thereby, limiting the possibility of multiple use of the document simultaneously. However, with the digitized format of the publications on the OAU's IR, multiple users can access the resources remotely and simultaneously. The implication is that the visibility of the university is being enhanced via their publications deposited on the IR. The OAU's IR can be visited by logging onto <https://ir.oauife.edu.ng> or via the university website <https://oauife.edu.ng>. The home page of OAU's IR is shown in figure I.

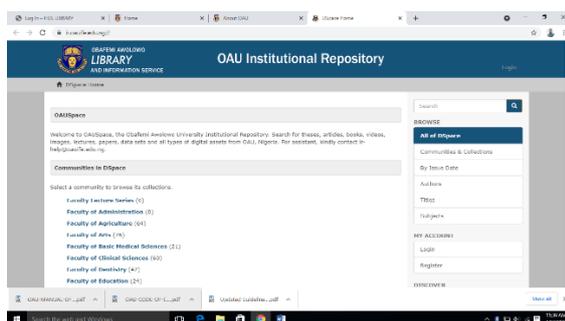


Figure I: Home Page of OAU Institutional Repository

From figure I, the OAU's IR is managed by the library and the software platform on which the IR runs is DSpace. The collections on the IR are categorized into communities that reflect the subject or type

of document or publication deposited on the IR. From the home page; users who may want to deposit their publications would first of all register on the IR to create an account (which will be validated by the IR Administrator), after which they can login to deposit their publications/documents. Users that wish to explore the resources on the IR can do that via the "search tab" using keywords, subjects, titles, authors or date of issue or by selecting a community and browsing through it.

### Importance of institutional repository

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. Institutions with open access e-documents enjoy higher usage and ranking of research materials, thereby improving the profile and ranking of both the institution and faculty members (Swan, 2010). Institutional repositories have become important in scholarly communication, institutional visibility, university ranking and feasible foundation of institutional knowledge management (Kakai, 2018). Saini (2018) noted that apart from enhancing the visibility of faculties and researchers intellectual works, IR supports scholarly communication among the academic community.

Crow (2002) opined that IR can serve as a tangible indicator of a university's quality and that it has the potential of showcasing the scientific, societal, and economic relevance of a university's research activities, and consequently increasing the visibility, status, and public value of the university. The documents on IR are digital in nature, these digital documents consist of all electronic publications such as journals, theses, books and conference papers (Okumu, 2015). Obafemi Awolowo University has on their IR resources such as: inaugural lectures, faculty lectures, theses, journal articles, conference

proceedings, and examination past questions. The OAU's IR provides a pool for digitally archiving the publications/documents that are products of the teaching, learning, research and community services activities of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. The shift from the conventional print publication to the use of digital sources and internet media have provided academic and research institutions in Nigeria with an opportunity to make their scholarly work accessible to the outside world. IR plays a role in improving the global visibility of academic research of a university community. Velmurugan, (2010) highlighted the role of IR in universities to include:

- Providing access to unpublished, but nevertheless valuable, research of faculty, research staff, and students,
- Promoting the principles of open access by providing opportunities for faculty self-archiving,
- Preserving and disseminating a wide variety of content beyond traditional scholarly articles, including datasets, learning objects, electronic theses and dissertations, audiovisual content, and presentations,
- It helps universities to fulfill their obligations to make publicly funded or non-profit-funded research available on an open access basis,
- It encourages access and sharing among disciplines and institutions,

Institutional repositories offer various benefits to the institutions, scholars and researchers. Saini (2018) opined that IR provides opportunity for an institution to share its digitized intellectual wealth with the worldwide community of scholars and provide long-term preservation solution. Asadi (2019) observed that university repositories provide scholars with broader knowledge related to the research that is

carried out by the individual or groups in the specific area of interest. IR present information users access to wide range of information materials or intellectual contents all in one platform and location for their use. The availability of IR improves institutional name, value, visibility and image by showcasing institutional intellectual works produced in the institution. (Lee & Stvilia, 2017) which improves the rating of institutions in academic ranking. It also showcases the value for institutional research funding spent on researches.

IR provides clue to the research activities of an institution, such that research funding bodies who had sponsored previous researches would be motivated into doing more. Ground breaking findings of research motivate institutions and government to release more funds and grants for research. There are number of institutes funded by the government, examples of such include National Centre for Technology Management (NACETEM), International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Institute for Advanced Medical Research and Training (IAMRT). The government provides enabling environment for the optimization of research and development. The growth and development of a nation depends on the scholarly outputs of researchers in universities and institutes. Results and findings of scholars bring about policy making, decision making and community development. Thus, the findings of scholars deposited on IR would enhance the policy and decision making of a wide range of users that may access the IR.

IR can also be used as a form of long-term preservation of work of scholars. There are factors such as insecurity, natural disasters, mutilation or theft that could hamper the durability and reliability of institutional publications when they are not in digital form. However, when these publications are archived in digital form as the case with IR, there will be no cause for alarm.

Institutional repository brings about increased productivity and effectiveness in the work place (Adaeze 2020). Faculty staff would be encouraged to work better as their publications uploaded in the repository would bring about wider audience and accessibility which can lead to sponsorships, scholarships and grants. Employees' productivity enhances growth and development in any institution or organization (Yaya, 2016).

However, the country is yet to fully take advantage of the benefits provided by open access institutional repositories compared to the high cost subscription-based journals which hinders societal growth and development.

### **Importance of acquiring and digitizing university publications in the library**

Information is vital to the planning, decision making and development of the university. It is important to provide a learning environment in which staff and student can gain knowledge, comply with regulations and operate effectively and efficiently. The Library serves the university in retrieving, organizing and keeping university documents and resources for use. There must be a procedure or technique in acquiring the documents and arranging the materials in the unit.

The publication unit is the section through which the university maintains a reliable institutional memory and makes available evidence of its academic and administrative activities and decision making, retain authentic records of its contributions to education, research and other academic activities. Members (both staff and students) of the university community are responsible for the generation of institutional records and information, while it is the responsibility of the library to capture and manage such documents. The publication unit then sends publications and

documents to the OAU's IR for better visibility and accessibility.

The existence of a university publication unit improves access to information. The major feature of the unit is the tremendous access to information about the university. There are some information materials that cannot be found online; they are manuscripts, speeches and letters that should be archived in the library for instance the history of Obafemi Awolowo University is on the web but it is hard to find the inaugural speech made by the second Vice-Chancellor, Hezekiah Oluwasanmi, after moving in from University of Ibadan to its permanent site, this document for instance is safely kept in the publication unit in the library.

The fact that a library should be organized further stresses the point of organizing all information and document coming out of a university in one particular section of the library for ease and satisfaction of intending users. A lot of information such as calendar, convocation brochure and university's handbook need a place where they can be properly stored, preserved and organized, and they are expected to be kept in the section so that it can be easily accessed by users.

The creation of a university publication section in the library gives the university opportunity of safeguarding vital and historical information. Documents kept in the unit can become useful in future. For instance OAU calendars, OAU report and statistics holds important information that users may want to consult years after their publication. Also the existence of the unit minimizes litigation risk because documents stating rules and regulations are easily accessible to staff and student to make use of. For instance OAU revised manual of administrative procedure which is also available in the section. All these documents are digitized as soon as they are acquired in the library. The digitization of such documents in the institutional

repository brings about better visibility and accessibility.

Acquiring and digitizing documents, publications and researches outputs is of great value to the university management because it provides support for a better decision making. Information has become a strategic necessity for any organization's well-being and sustainability (Eckerson, 2002). The ability of an organization to manage the quality of its information can determine its success. The ability to keep and manage quality information is an advantage for any organization (Azemi 2018). Availability of current and correct information will enable organizations to make wise decisions and overcome the problems being encountered. (Meiryani, 2020) and the decision will minimize problems that can disrupt the survival of an organization

The university publication section and institutional repository provides students and staff including visitors the opportunity of updating themselves with the happenings of the university, by reading university magazines, calendars while some are interested in knowing more about the university by reading history of the university and so on.

### **Raising awareness of institutional repository and publication unit**

There is collaboration between the OAU publication unit and the Library ICT department. Documents acquired in OAU publications are sent to ICT department to be scanned and uploaded. There is an opportunity for authors to deposit their e-document in the repository but the visibility and accessibility of such works lies on the repository administrator after certifying the work. It is therefore a necessity for students, staff and researchers to be aware of the availability of information resources. It is important for staff and students to be aware of the institutional repository; it is a

prerequisite for accessibility and utilization of available publications, documents and articles. Thus, Ivwighreghweta (2012) identified lack of knowledge, inadequate advocacy and poor state of ICT as the challenge responsible for the slow uptake of IRs in Africa.

An academic library is the center of knowledge in a university which caters for the information thirst of staff, students and researchers and provides information materials to aid the school curriculum (Curzon, 2009). Librarians and other library supporting staff acquire appropriate information materials, organize or classify them and make them available for use. Several staff and students are still not aware of the opportunities and possibilities available in the unit. Informed library users knows that libraries have resources that are scholarly and comprehensive than the ones on the web (Ozomelem, 2009). It is important to satisfy the needs of the library users. Bassey (2006) stated that satisfying the request of users means making available actual information or services that will meet their needs.

Olafinsawe (2010) stated that university libraries have to develop a good collection of information resources in both physical and digital format so that the needs of the users can be met. It is therefore important to make available materials or resources from within the University for Staff and students to make use of. After availability, utilization is the key in knowledge creation. Knowledge can be created through information gathering, information users need to know where and how information required can be found. The institutional repository is a huge platform where knowledge can be created and where facts can be used for problem solving, it is therefore important to create awareness programs about the endless opportunities of the IR.

### **Challenges facing OAU institutional repository and Publication unit**

The emergence of Open Access Initiatives provides an effective platform addressing the problem of poor visibility of academic research information in Nigeria. However there are several challenges hindering the sustainability of institutional repository in higher institutions.

Lack of funding is a major problem experienced by institutions in their effort to establish and sustain digital repositories. Nigerian institutions have limited financial resources as compared to their counterparts in developed countries (Bashiru, 2010). The cost of establishing and sustaining digital repositories in Nigeria is high and most of the universities in Nigeria receive substantial part of their funding from the government's budgetary allocation which is on a steady decline. (Musa et al, 2014).

Ignorance and the lack of IR awareness is one of the challenges facing the development of IR in universities. For instance, Christaian (2008) identified the lack of knowledge of IR as one of the major issues hindering the growth and development of IR in developing countries and thus they opined that progress on IR can only be achieved when the ignorance of IR is holistically addressed. Some university staff and students are still not aware of the existence of the institutional repository making it challenging for library staff in retrieving documents and uploading research work. Ogbomo & Muokebe (2015) revealed that there is a lack of knowledge or awareness of open access institutional repository which is an obstacle to the development of institutional repository in institutions. Christian (2008) further stated that knowledge of open access institutional repository is very low among the major stakeholders in the developing nations. The stakeholders include lecturers, researchers, librarians as well as students. The low level of awareness of open access institutional repository in Nigeria is directly linked to issues of inadequate advocacy for open

access in Nigeria. Also some staff and students are reluctant in making use of the library which is due to lack of proper knowledge of making use of the library, this reduces the traffic of information users in the library.

The need for OAU publications to be digitized is a challenge in itself; this is because retrospective conversion of non-digital publications into digital forms requires effort in terms of identifying, selecting, scanning and depositing of the publications to the IR. This is also challenging for staff as the publications requiring retrospective conversion is the sole responsibility of the library staff. Hence, the workload on repository administrator makes it challenging for staff to scan and upload backlog of documents that will be in the repository. It is also important to note that although some faculty members do deposit their publications on the IR, the publications' metadata supplied for the IR are often time with errors, and when this occurs the bulk of the corrections fall at the table of the repository administrator(s) who proof-read and make corrections before they are accepted into the IR.

Furthermore there is inadequate skilled manpower in handling the sustainability of digital repository. Ezema (2013) from their findings reported that, the most nagging problem in the digitization project is attracting the required skills for troubleshooting of equipment such as computer systems, scanners among others. Power outage, slow or no internet are the issues faced while working on the repository. Electricity and wireless connection is relatively good on OAU campus but when there is an absence of it, it is usually very frustrating for administrators, researchers and users. The development of open access institutional repositories requires fast and reliable internet connection as well as deployment of adequate information and communication technology infrastructure. Electricity supply is a major problem in

developing countries like Nigeria; this problem has made the development of projects like an institutional repository in Nigeria much difficult and expensive. Fatunde (2008) observed that poor electricity supply is a major impediment to the operation and growth of information and communication technology in Nigerian universities. Poor electricity supply results to dependence of universities running on generator which increases the daily running cost. Low exploitation of Information Communication Technology (ICT) means reluctance of faculty members in uploading their scholarly work on the IR. Some researchers and scholars are not making use of the resources available which can be of immense benefits to them.

### Conclusion

The university library plays an important role in satisfying the information needs of the users. IR is an important aspect of library services that offers visibility and open access of scholarly work. Accessibility of scholarly output would bring up facts findings, solve societal problems and cause changes in policy making and decision making resulting in national growth and development. Thus, government, universities and private bodies should key into establishment, sustainability and funding of the IR. It is also of great importance in making internal publications, documents, reports and resources available in the library and it is even more important that those information materials are utilized.

### Recommendations

1. There is need for increased funding from government and international donor agencies to help academic and research institutions in Nigeria and to improve the state of their ICT facilities and digital repository.
2. An enabling environment and the necessary infrastructure which includes

regular power supply, good internet connection should be provided to enable staff and repository librarians to digitize research publications.

3. Awareness programs and strategies must be put in place in other for the university community to populate the institutional repository and improve the value and ranking of the institutions.
4. Library orientation programs should be extensively done to encourage the use of libraries and prevent fear, tension or reluctance in using the library.

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