

Utilization of Open Educational Resources in Teaching and Research in Academic Libraries: A Review of Literature

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Abstract

Academic libraries occupy a central position in the discovery, curation, and dissemination of Open Educational Resources (OER) within institutions of higher learning. As digital scholarship expands and the cost of commercially published textbooks and journals continues to rise, libraries are increasingly called upon to build the infrastructure, skills, and advocacy needed to embed OER into teaching and research practice. The present review investigates the application of OER in academic library contexts. It draws on current literature to identify the functions of libraries in the promotion of OER, the provision of technical and copyright advice in this connection, and the forming of policy on the OER at the institutional level. The review also looks into the factors that impede the use of OER by libraries, especially in developing countries. Some of the factors include poor staff capacity and lack of infrastructure as well as awareness among educators and learners. The authors come to a conclusion that if academic libraries have necessary resources and clear policies, they can effectively contribute to making educational materials available to a large audience through OER initiatives.

Keywords: Open Educational Resources, Academic Libraries, Librarians, Teaching and Research, Open Access, Higher Education.

1. Introduction

Traditionally, academic libraries have played the role of information gatekeepers by opening channels of access for students and professors to their required scholarly materials. While the rising costs of both textbooks and subscription services for academic materials have influenced many institutions to seek Open Educational Resources as a better way of access (Mwinyimbegu, 2019), libraries have also remained important players in the new development. The situation of libraries in Scotland is a good example: libraries have been seen actively offering essential OER services, including training on licensing and digital publishing processes for faculty members and academic staff (Thompson & Muir, 2020). Some African colleges have initiated their advocacy programs where librarians promote the idea of using OER among faculty and students alike through seminars and training sessions (Bakrin, 2023). While the abovementioned example shows that libraries are key for understanding and implementing the OER idea, the information provided above indicates that the role of academic libraries in the development of the OER movement in developing countries (Kenya in particular) has been relatively insufficient and poorly studied. This review therefore examines the existing literature on how academic libraries facilitate the discovery, promotion, and institutional embedding of OER for teaching and research.

2. Methodology/Design

This paper reviews recent literature addressing the role of academic libraries in the utilization of Open Educational Resources. It examines, in turn, the role of libraries in promoting OER awareness and access, the support services libraries provide for OER development and use, the impact of library-facilitated OER on teaching and research outcomes, and the institutional policy frameworks that shape library OER programmers. The review closes with conclusions on measures that can strengthen OER utilization through academic libraries.

3. Literature Review

3.1 The Role of Academic Libraries in Promoting OER Awareness and Access

A recurring theme in the literature is that awareness, rather than availability, is the primary constraint on OER utilization, and that libraries are well placed to close this gap. A study of librarians in selected Tanzanian public

university libraries found that while OER present an important alternative to costly textbooks for supporting teaching, learning, and research, many librarians themselves had only a moderate level of awareness of OER, which limited their ability to promote these resources to faculty and students (Mwinyimbegu, 2019).

Research in Nigeria on university librarians has yielded similar results, indicating that librarians carry out three important functions with regards to learning materials – the creation of learning materials, their selection and acquisition, and the promotion of OERs (Oerenjan & Araza, 2020). A study in the Philippines on librarians' management of OERs shows that merely because a library was not fully aware of OERs resulted in a lack of order and storage for OERs (E. Calilung et al., 2020).

Research on open access resources in African university libraries similarly notes that the pursuit of freely available scholarly and educational content helps narrow the information divide between better-resourced and less-resourced institutions, while placing new demands on librarians to rigorously assess the quality and reliability of openly licensed material before recommending it to users (IFLA repository study on Open Access Resources for Academic Libraries in Africa, n.d.).

3.2 Library Support Services for OER Development and Use

Aside from spreading awareness, academic libraries in some areas have transitioned to organize its services on OER. In other words, a research about the experience with OER in two Scottish academic libraries has shown that the libraries can provide assistance regarding OER, starting from training the academics about copyright laws and skills for digital publishing in order to help them create OER instead of just offering them already existing materials (Thompson & Muir, 2020). Moreover, this research suggested that the main obstacle preventing libraries from providing more services in the framework of OER is lack of qualified employees even if there is enough willingness on the part of the administration. The role of OER in academic environment in 2023 has shown that during the periods when access to physical collections in libraries was limited, the libraries played a key role in helping academics to find and use digital materials that are opened for use, emphasizing the role of libraries in discovering materials in OER (Role of Open Educational Resources in the academic environment: A Study, 2023). Complementary work in Nigeria similarly framed OER as a response to the escalating cost of scholarly and educational publications, arguing that academic libraries have a duty to build promotion and awareness programmers so that restrictive copyright and high cost no longer prevent equitable access to teaching and learning materials (SJSU Scholar Works study on OER promotion in Nigerian university libraries, 2021).

3.3 Impact of Library-Facilitated OER on Teaching and Research

When libraries actively support OER, there are evident benefits for research and teaching outputs. Research done across Europe by the European Network of Open Education Librarians examining how the 2019 UNESCO OER Recommendation is being implemented in 136 university libraries has revealed concrete accomplishments of libraries in all five areas of action specified in the Recommendation, from capacity building to development of policies to the establishment of supporting infrastructure for OER (Santos-Hermosa, 2024). This proves that engagement of libraries is an important factor in the progress of universities with regard to OER. At the same time, it should be noted that awareness does not always translate into use, as shown by research on open access practices among health sciences researchers in Tanzania. Despite efforts of librarians to promote open access initiatives, many scientists were only partially aware of and therefore were able to use open resources when conducting their research (Lwoga & Questier, cited in library support literature). Integration depends as much on sustained faculty engagement and institutional incentive structures as on the resources libraries make available (case study review on OER use in higher education teaching, n.d.).

3.4 Institutional Policy and the Library's Place Within It

According to literature, it has been established that having the right institutional policy in place is a precondition for the successful implementation of OER programs run by libraries. The findings of the case study in Scotland showed that out of the institutions involved in the study, only a few had written OER policy, which restricted the extent of libraries' initiatives because there was no authority for librarians to give priority to OER activities (Thompson & Muir, 2020). The findings of the Nigerian research on the management of OER at public university libraries are in line with previous observations and demonstrate that the presence of well-defined management practices including clearly

defined responsibilities for library personnel in the processes of vetting and providing the content are connected to formalized objectives regarding OER at the policy level (Salau, Adamu & Salami, 2024).

Earlier work situating libraries within the wider Open Educational Resources movement in Africa had already argued that librarians possess skills in cataloguing, metadata, and information organization that intersect directly with what institutional OER initiatives require and recommended that universities formally designate libraries as coordinating bodies for OER rather than leaving OER development solely to individual academic departments (Robertson, 2010). This recommendation remains relevant: where policy assigns the library an explicit coordinating role, the literature suggests OER utilization is more consistent and better sustained over time.

4. Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this paper indicates that academic libraries can play a substantial role in advancing the utilization of Open Educational Resources for teaching and research, provided they are given the staffing, training, and institutional mandate to do so. Libraries are already engaged in raising awareness of OER, offering technical and copyright support to academic staff, and, in some regions, shaping the broader institutional response to UNESCO's OER Recommendation. However, persistent challenges, including limited librarian awareness in some contexts, inadequate ICT infrastructure, insufficient staffing, and the absence of formal OER policy, continue to restrict the scale of these efforts, particularly in developing countries.

Going forward, academic institutions should invest in structured capacity-building for library staff, formally designate the library as a coordinating body for institutional OER initiatives, and allocate dedicated resources for OER promotion and collection management. Doing so would allow academic libraries to fulfil their potential as central drivers of affordable, high-quality teaching and research materials for faculty and students alike.

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