Chapter 10
Adoption of Institutional Repositories Towards Realization of Digital Libraries:
The Southern African Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Dissemination of the literature is crucial in scholarship for it to meaningfully contribute to development. The establishment of the Open Archives Initiative and the BOAI transformed the scholarly communication landscape. Open access institutional repository (IR) is one innovative technology through which scholarly literature can be made freely available and accessible to the public. Academic libraries across the globe, including Africa, embraced and established IRs to enable cost-free access to their institutional research output on the internet, thus increasing its global visibility and reach while ensuring long-term preservation of the intellectual output. This chapter explores the role of open access repositories in enhancing access to information and knowledge generation in academic libraries, catalogues the success of IRs in Southern Africa, and ascertains the challenges faced by universities in Southern Africa in the establishment and management of IRs.

INTRODUCTION

Dissemination of research literature is a crucial element in scholarly communication for the literature to meaningfully contribute to socio-economic development of nations. Socio-economic development relies on increased distribution and access to knowledge and information to a wider audience to promote

active participation of researchers in scholarly communication discourse as they share ideas, opinions, and discoveries. Concern has been raised over the low visibility of intellectuals and scholars from Africa (Abrahams et al., 2010). The reasons for their global absence include, that many of them are not able to publish their works in international journals and monographs produced by the world's leading commercial publishers (Molteno, 2016; Chan, Kirsop & Arunachalam, 2011; Kotecha & Perold, 2010), works published in journals and books from developing countries are largely not indexed in major international databases such as the Arts and Humanities Citation Index. These challenges are amplified by the failure of academic libraries to sustain journal subscriptions and purchase of monographs to support research efforts of intellectuals and researchers in their institutions due to constrained budgets (Tapfuma & Hoskins, 2021). As a result, annual cancellations of journal and monograph subscriptions and purchases have become common practice (Siler, 2017). Moahi (2009) opines that the African continent's major weakness has been its failure to acquire and apply knowledge for development. Commercial publishers impose subscription and copyright restrictions which curtail knowledge sharing and wider dissemination of scholarship. As a result, critical and relevant information and knowledge generated by researchers from the African continent published in international journals oftentimes is inaccessible to the intended beneficiaries who should generate solutions for problems bedeviling the region. Johnson et al., (2018) confirm that deterrents to information access potentially result in substantial non-productive activity by researchers and knowledge workers and missed opportunities. Documented barriers to access include, pricing and cost of journals, journal articles and books, lack of awareness of available resources, and cumbersome purchasing procedures.

The open access movement ushered into the scholarly communication system a new dimension to distribution and access to scholarship by making it freely available to all potential users as pre-prints and post post-prints. The aim of this chapter is to explore the strides made by universities in Southern African countries in adopting open access institutional repository platforms to collect, preserve, facilitate broad sharing and circulation of research output from the institutions to a global audience (Tapfuma & Hoskins, 2020). To circumvent the information access restrictions imposed by commercial publishers and promote cost free access to published and unpublished scholarly literature produced by scholars within institutions, many universities in Africa have established open access repositories. Through open access, knowledge and information that has been hidden in offices (grey literature) or in inaccessible platforms can potentially be exposed to intended beneficiaries to promote scholarly discourse, discovery and generation of new knowledge leading to socio-economic development of the continent (Tennant et al., 2016). Though IRs disrupted the traditional working culture of librarians their potential advantages outweigh their challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the need for libraries to adopt innovative technologies to facilitate increased remote access to research literature. Governments, across the globe, imposed lockdown measures which compelled companies and institutions to close, and everyone had to work from home; physical access to libraries by scholars for research was restricted as most institutions also closed their libraries and began to offer their services remotely (Tsekea & Chigwada, 2021). The chapter explores the role of open repositories in enhancing access to information and knowledge generation by academic libraries, catalogues success of IRs in Southern Africa and explores challenges faced by universities in Southern Africa in establishing and managing IRs.

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