

THE ROLE OF LIBRARY PERSONNEL IN THE CREATION, ADVOCACY AND DISCOVERABILITY OF OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This study examines the management of open educational resources (OER) among personnel working in university libraries in Osun State. It looks at the involvement of the staff in the creation, advocacy, and discoverability of OER in the institutions. The sampling technique included one hundred and sixty-three (163) library personnel 91 librarians and 72 library officers serving in the institutions. A descriptive survey design was adopted using a structured questionnaire via Google Forms through the Osun State chapter of the Nigeria Library Association, and personal e-mail addresses. Only one hundred and sixteen (116) respondents filled out and submitted the questionnaire. The data generated from this process was analyzed subsequently using descriptive statistics. The findings indicate that the personnel are involved in advocacy projects, creation, and discoverability of OER in the university libraries. However, there is room for improvement to deepen this crucial involvement.

Keywords: Open Educational Resources, OER creation, OER advocacy, OER discoverability

Introduction

Academic libraries are natural partners in Open Educational Resources (OERs) which have become popular means of conveying pedagogical information materials to the generality of tertiary institutions, especially the economically disadvantaged students.

Ever since its open endorsement by UNESCO, institutions of higher learning have adopted it as an alternative to the traditional textbooks priced out of the reach of many students (Bliss & Smith, 2017).

The proliferation of OERs is not limited to the academic communities in the global North. The global south has also keyed into the concept and propagated its adoption by the faculty to enhance the spread of its usage.

The ease of accessibility to information resources that OERs embody is an essence of

librarianship enshrined in the Ranganathan laws of library science. So, besides economic consideration, information services are better delivered through OERs when the intervention of library personnel is encouraged and adequately utilized.

In the global north, the synergy between the librarians and the faculty has moved beyond the concept of subject or liaison librarian to a more enduring phenomenon known as embedded librarianship.

Collection development is vital to the survival of the library system. Dill and Cullen (2020) observed that the involvement of library personnel in the selection of appropriate, quality, and valuable OERs beyond what is produced by the faculty is paramount to the sustainability of OERs as an educational material.

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The expertise of the library profession is brought to bear on the selection process in this era of information overload. Similarly, the library personnel are relevant in the process of creating OERs by the faculty. Experiences have shown that while the faculty writes books for publications, the statistics of usage by the library patrons are adequately captured by the librarians.

Therefore, to advise appropriately on those subject areas and texts where OERs should be considered by the faculty, consultation with the library is essential (Coyne, 2021).

Moreover, librarians also assist in metadata creation for the available OER (Temesio, 2020). Even after publishing the OER materials, the intended users may still not use them adequately.

Thus, advocacy and publicity aimed at creating awareness for OER is undertaken by the library as a dependable partner in the information service business (McLure & Sinkinson, 2020).

It is on this premise that academic libraries organize symposia, seminars, open access week, etc. to enlighten the reading public about the importance of OER and similar resources to educational advancement.

Thus tripod of librarian involvement vis-à-vis, content creation, selection and acquisition, and advocacy projects makes it indispensable in the course of managing OERs in the university community.

The relevance of the OERs to economic amelioration and its impact on information service delivery has been unquestionable globally. This is a phenomenon that has been acknowledged within Nigerian academia even though the level of involvement of libraries in content creation has been restricted.

The current study will further populate the literature on open educational resources by

Nigerian authors with specific bias to the management of OER materials. It will further expand the sphere of specific roles of the university libraries in content creation, advocacy, and strategies to ensure the findability of OERs.

The shortfall in subject coverage by existing OER materials noted by Bakrin and Liasu (2024) can easily be taken care of with the direct involvement of the libraries and thus further integrate OERs into library services.

Statement of Problem

Several authors have discussed OER in the Nigerian space with great emphasis on the relationship between the library and the new initiative.

Some scholars have addressed promotional issues (Ogunbodede & Cocodia, 2023; Ogunbodede et al, 2021; Wiche & Ogunbodede, 2021), infrastructure (Idowu et al, 2023), and challenges impeding the adoption of OER in the academic communities in Nigeria.

Only a few publications have addressed the case of the role of the library and librarians in the management (Ailakhu & Ibrahim, 2024) of OER in Nigerian universities.

Then, it has only scratched the surface without addressing the core areas of deeper involvement of librarians in content creation, selection and acquisition, and advocacy projects.

This dearth of abundant literature on the participation of Nigerian libraries and librarians in the creation and collection development of OER has created a gap that ought to be filled for the nation to catch up with the rest of the world.

Also, the few Nigerian literature on the role of librarians in content creation acknowledged that the involvement of librarians is not widespread (Zaid, 2019). This acknowledgment calls for concern given the economic reality among the teeming Nigerian students.

Meanwhile, the professional expertise of the librarians and libraries which has positioned them sufficiently for such assignments will become redundant. Therefore, this study intends to fill this vacuum and awaken both the libraries and the academia to this important but often neglected consideration of the libraries as indispensable partners in OER management.

Research Questions

This study generally examines the role of libraries and librarians in the management of open educational resources in the university libraries located in Osun State. Specifically, however, the following details are questions that the study uncovers:

1. What is the involvement of university libraries and librarians in the creation of content in the open educational resources in Osun State?
2. What are the advocacy activities conducted by the university libraries and librarians in Osun State to promote the use of open educational resources within academia?
3. What has been the role of the university libraries and librarians in ensuring the findability of open educational resources by the users?

Literature Review

Open Educational Resources (OER) Africa was established in 2008 to consolidate the OER movement in Africa (OER Africa, 2021). Jobe et al (2018) have identified three important elements in OER management namely creation, curation, and discovery of OER content.

Librarians have the professional training to drive the creation, adaptation, and curation of OER (Katz, 2018). Even though OER is not new to Nigerian library personnel, there have been no

widespread specific roles and responsibilities for librarians in OER initiatives (Zaid, 2019).

There is a need for more inclusivity if we envisage an OER initiative that is acceptable to all the stakeholders including library personnel (Mishra, 2017) more so when the library has assisted greatly in providing infrastructure for the storage, creation, and dissemination of OER (Cummings-Sauls, et al, 2018). Librarians could work directly with the faculty to identify valuable information resources that could contribute immensely to the academic progression of the students and collaborate to produce OER on such textbooks (Avila & Wray, 2018).

The importance of OERs to knowledge advancement institutions has been attested to by several authors.

Donaldson (2016) observed that the higher cost of subject textbooks in tertiary institutions is affecting student customer behavior making it difficult for students to stork their libraries and for the book vendors to maximize profit via patronage by the students. Jung (2017) noted that financial savings are therefore made by students through the adoption of OER.

This observation is in tandem with the position of Temesio (2020) who acknowledged that OER is a cost-saving initiative that guarantees inclusive education to the socioeconomically marginalized group.

Besides the reduction in the financial obligations of students on book procurement, Cheung et al (2023) noted that students generally perceived OER to be more beneficial during the COVID-19 crisis, especially about open online courses and open-access textbooks.

He noted further that students in physical class mode perceived OER to be more useful for tests and examinations while students in distance learning modules relate its usefulness more to being supplements to course materials.

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Both are however concerned about the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the OER. In their study, Jung et al (2017) discovered that it is perceived by the faculty that OER books are of equal or greater quality than traditional textbooks.

Some faculty believe students perform better when they use traditional textbooks.

Orzech and Abramovich (2020) noted that it is undeniable that librarians are not the traditional owners of open educational resources.

The creators of the OERs are the faculty who originate these pedagogical resources to ensure alternative texts for the use of the students of tertiary institutions. However, the job of its creation and subsequent activities that can influence its accessibility and use cannot be exclusively appropriated by the faculty.

Thus, the librarians as agents of information resource dissemination are appropriately positioned to fill the gaps that are required in OER creation. Access to a variety of information resources, understanding of the peculiar features of qualitative library materials, and other technicalities that surround the book production chain make the involvement of librarians in OER creation unavoidable.

This can be comprehended in some collaborative projects and teamwork aimed at integrating OER into the SDGs of the United Nations. Such projects include the iEnergy Open Library; a component of 2020 OE4BW projects (SDG7 Hub).

This was the submission of Drevensek and Urbancic (2022). Therefore, librarians are important partners and collaborators in the creation of OERs (Runyon & Steffy, 2021; Smith, Workman, Hartsell & Hill, 2023)

Through OER, the librarian plays the role of a mediator between the instructor and the

student facilitating access to the resources via repositories (Jalil, 2022). OER can easily be integrated into the repository leading to an economy of cost and ease of operability.

Al Abri and Dabbagh (2018) discovered that the findability of appropriate OER by students remains an obstacle as well as the near absence of regulation and control which makes it an all-comers' job. This discovery essentially gives credence to the popular saying that accessibility to information resources is as important as its availability.

Ali (2018) noted that a Ranganathan law of library science has advocated accessibility to library resources as the core and essence of user services in the library. It is this accessibility that provides insight to authors' insights and guarantees users' satisfaction.

Despite the acknowledged advantages of OER, literature has identified locating, finding, and retrieving these resources as a constant challenge to the users (Vladoiu, 2013).

Apart from sustainability and remixing, discoverability has emerged as a significant obstacle in the way of OER in academic institutions (Luo et al, 2019). Dichev et al (2011) noted that the availability of open content is not enough to guarantee accessibility.

The non-discoverability of these materials has ensured low patronage by users even when the resources are available for use. The proliferation of OER is acknowledged globally.

Therefore, rather than creating new platforms for OER, the focus in this contemporary age should be geared towards ensuring the discoverability of the existing ones and linking them together to enhance their visibility to a wider audience (Otto & Kerres, 2022).

Roncovic (2021) suggested that one of the major roles of the librarian is to help with the discoverability of OER via directories such as

dedicated repositories and portals. It should be noted that the faculty is not highly skilled at finding OER materials.

The majority of the academic staff require assistance on how to locate open educational resources (Fischer, 2020). Librarians possess the skills to assist students and faculty in finding quality OER materials (Davis, 2016).

The libraries could aggregate OERs across all departments of the university and make them freely available through the repositories of the university (Mitchell, 2014) and assist the users in identifying the materials (Upneja, 2020).

Perifanou and Economides (2022) observed that missing metadata descriptions and the absence of uniform OER metadata descriptions are the major obstacles to adequate discoverability of OER by the users.

Therefore, compliance with metadata standards and metadata consistency are crucial to the description and management of digital resources in a bid to ensure their discovery (Tmava & Alemneh, 2013).

This metadata creation is a professional calling of the library personnel (Temesio, 2020). When metadata are not properly made to align with user requirements, it consequently leads to inaccessibility (Beyene & Godwin, 2018).

Librarians are significant to resource discovery (of texts needed to prepare OERs), information literacy, and cataloguing of information resources (Braddlee & VanScoy, 2019).

Leng (2016) observed that Japanese open source software, WEKO was used to develop two web portal repositories on OER materials. Apart from making the content freely available, it spotlights the librarian as manager of institutional assets.

In the same vein, the library of the Ukrainian State University of Science and Technology has played a formidable role in the facilitation of online text and non-text OER for the use of staff and students on distance learning programmes (Kolesnykova 2022).

To cater to the information needs and usability of special people, Navarrete and Lujan-Mora (2015) noted that standard practices that are designed to make usability easy for special library users, accessibility to the web, and presence of appropriate information architecture are the three vital areas that must be considered in a bid to include people with special needs in OER findability.

Even though OER has become widely recognized as a substitute for traditional educational resources, its awareness and adoption among the faculty after decades of its existence is still low.

They need to be aware of what their institutions possess as well as those floating in cyberspace (Otto & Kerres, 2022). It has been proven that OER can improve the retention memory of its users and influence learning outcomes.

It was discovered that the hesitation of the faculty to buy into the total adoption of OER stems from their ignorance of its benefits for students and staff and lack of exposure on their part (Hutson et al, 2022). Even though, there is observable gradual growth and sustainability in the mechanisms for faculty-induced support for OER.

However, to attain the status of a permanently funded resource, OER still requires wider support. Presently, teaching and learning centers and academic libraries remain the major sponsors of OER initiatives (McGowan, 2019).

The role of the library and the librarians in facilitating the use of OER is highly significant. They are important collaborators in the promotion

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of OER materials Upneja (2020). Brown et al (2017) recently acknowledged that beyond traditional librarianship, librarians in this age could participate and collaborate with other stakeholders in what is known as embedded librarianship.

The core traditional skills learned in the library school will always be handy even in the technology-driven information environment (Murray, 2014).

Thus, librarians could support OER via advocacy, support, dissemination, advisory, creation, and management (Coyne & Alfis, 2021).

LibGuides on OER were created by OER Community of Practice (CoP); a group of academic librarians from British Columbia to coordinate collective advocacy on OER.

A guide was equally created to evaluate the quality of OER resources while they participate in organizing Open Access Week (Smith & Lee, 2017).

In some other climes, the librarians assist in organizing workshops on Creative Commons licenses and open textbooks to enlighten both the students and faculty (McGeary et al, 2020)

Methodology

This study looks at the involvement of library personnel of universities located in Osun State in the management of open educational resources vis-à-vis creation, advocacy, and discoverability of this category of electronic resources. The study population comprises ninety-one (91) librarians and seventy-two (72) library officers in the thirteen NUC-approved universities in the state.

A total sampling technique was used to select the entire one hundred and sixty-three (163) library personnel as the study sample as a result of the fewness of the population.

A descriptive survey design was used to elicit data from respondents using a structured questionnaire.

To obtain data from the targeted population, Google Form was designed and administered through the Nigeria Library Association (NLA) Osun State Chapter WhatsApp platform.

Also, hard copies of the questionnaire were administered to some other respondents via interpersonal contact. One hundred and sixteen (116) respondents filled out and submitted the questionnaire.

Data generated were analyzed using descriptive statistics which comprises tables, figures, and frequencies.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Table 1: Advocacy for OER

	Advocacy activities for the promotion of OERs by librarians	SD	D	A	SA	Frequency
1	My library deploys its social media handles to promote and create awareness of the benefits of OERs	13 11.2%	21 18.1%	54 46.6%	28 24.1%	116 100%
2	Organization of Open Access Week is a yearly but established event in my library	6 5.2%	32 28%	63 54.3%	15 13%	116 100%
3	My library participates in the formation of a consortium of library advocates for the promotion of OER	31 27%	57 49%	21 18%	7 6%	116 100%
4	Regular public lectures/rally is organized by my library to create awareness of the availability and use of OERs	26 22.4%	61 52.5%	18 15.5%	11 10%	116 100%
5	My library regularly prints and distributes souvenirs and fliers to promote OER materials adoption	17 14.7%	58 50%	27 23.3%	14 12.1%	116 100%

Table 1 shows the options selected by respondents as advocacy efforts for promoting OERs by librarians.

The majority of 54 (46.6%) respondents agreed that their libraries use social media handles to promote and raise awareness about the benefits of OERs; 63 respondents (54%) agreed that organizing Open Access Week is a yearly but established event in their libraries; 49% of 57 respondents disagreed that their libraries participate in the formation of a consortium of library advocates for the promotion of OERs; 61 respondents (52.5%) disagreed that

their library organizes frequent public lectures/rallies to raise awareness about the availability and usage of OERs, while 58 respondents (50%) disagreed that their library regularly publishes and distributes souvenir and fliers to promote OER materials adoption.

In conclusion, 63 respondents (54.3%) of the librarians agreed that the organization of Open Access Week is a yearly but established event in their libraries. It confirms Open Access Week as a generally acceptable medium by the majority of the libraries to advocate for the adoption and use of OER in academia.

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Table 2: OER Content Creation by Librarians

	Involvement of librarians in OER content creation	SD	D	A	SA	Frequency
1	My library helps in the selection of quality books appropriate for OER course adoption	16 13.8%	25 21.6%	52 45%	23 19.8%	116 100%
2	My library contributes to open education through OER selection from online outlets	10 9%	39 33.6%	49 42%	18 15.5%	116 100%
3	My library designs and supports discovery systems and institutional repositories that enable access to and delivery of educational content	11 10%	23 19.8%	61 52.5%	21 18%	116 100%
4	I participate in curating collections of OER and open-access scholarly content	25 21.5%	17 14.7%	47 40.5%	27 23.3%	116 100%
5	I do partake in the assessment of OER produced by the faculty to ascertain its quality	22 18.9%	58 50%	31 27%	5 4.3%	116 100%
6	My library is involved in advising the faculty on copyright matters during the process of creating OERs	28 24.1%	46 39.6%	32 28%	10 8.6%	116 100%

Table 2 displays the options picked by respondents regarding librarian involvement in OER material creation.

The majority of respondents, 52 (45%), agreed that their library assists in the selection of quality books appropriate for OER course adoption; another majority category of respondents, 49 (42%), agreed that their library contributes to open education through OER selection from online outlets; 61 (52.5%) respondents agreed that their libraries build and support discovery tools and institutional repositories that allow access to and dissemination of educational information.

47 responses (40.5%) are involved in curating collections of OER and open-access

scholarly content; Despite the aforementioned involvement of librarians in OER material creation, the majority of respondents, 58 (50%) here, disagree that they do analyze OER to determine its quality, and 46 (39.6%) disagreed that their libraries advised professors on copyright issues throughout the creation of OERs.

The aforementioned analysis has revealed that the majority of respondents, 58 (50%), deny that they review OER for quality.

This implies that academic library personnel who are professionally trained to determine the quality of resources have not lived up to the daunting task.

Table 3: Role of Librarians in OER Discoverability

	Role of librarians in ensuring the discoverability of OERs	SD	D	A	SA	Frequency
1	In my library, the cataloguing of and metadata creation for OER materials are given the needed attention	30 25.8%	45 39%	23 19.8%	18 15.5%	116 100%
2	OER materials created by the faculty are published under open licenses in my library	19 16.3%	63 54.3%	24 21%	10 8.6%	116 100%
3	To increase the rate of findability of the OERs, I participate in the redistribution and sharing of those materials to the potential users	9 7.7%	32 28%	54 46.6%	21 18%	116 100%
4	To ensure ease of accessibility, my library organizes user education for its patrons on how to locate OERs	18 15.5%	62 53.4%	29 25%	7 6%	116 100%
5	I ensure active deployment of OERs during my engagement in reference services of the university library	32 27.5%	43 37.1%	22 19%	19 16.4%	116 100%

Table 3 above also revealed the role of librarians in ensuring the discoverability of OERs.

45 respondents representing (39%) strongly disagreed that cataloguing of and metadata creation for OER materials is given the needed attention in their libraries; another majority category where 63 respondents representing (54.3%) disagreed that OER materials created by the faculty are published under open licenses in their libraries; in the opposite to above interpretation, 54 (46.6%) of the librarians agreed that they participate in redistribution and sharing of those materials to the potential users to increase the findability of the OERs; 62(53.4%) respondents disagreed that to ensure ease of accessibility, their library organizes user education for its patrons on how to locate OERs and 43 respondents representing (37.1%) disagreed that they ensure active deployment of OERs during their engagement in reference services of the university library. These data revealed that OER materials created by the faculty are published under open licenses in the library (63 respondents of 54.3%).

This is a footstep towards adequate discoverability of the available OER in academic libraries.

Discussion

The study found that the library personnel in the universities located in Osun State use social media as tools for the creation of awareness and advocacy for the use of open educational resources stating the numerous advantages of this category of electronic resources.

In their bid to advocate the course of the OER, the annual Open Access Week is organized to enlighten the populace and solicit support. However, this advocacy is restricted to individual libraries that are yet to form a consortium for joint projects on OER advocacy. Similarly, many libraries have yet to consider the organization of public lectures and distribution of fliers as alternative approaches.

Earlier studies by Coyne and Alfis (2021) and Smith and Lee (2017) indicate the contribution of library personnel to OER advocacy especially in the area of organization of

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annual Open Access Week which university libraries in Osun State have embraced.

This is even though the libraries are yet to organize themselves into a consortium jointly advocating OER adoption.

Similarly, it was discovered that library personnel are deeply involved in some activities related to the creation of OERs. The personnel are instrumental in the selection of appropriate and quality textbooks that are adopted for OER by the faculty as much as they participate in the selection of OER materials from various outlets online.

However, they have not advanced to the stage of advising the faculty on the copyright implications of adopting these resources and assessing the quality of internally produced OER.

Cummings-Sauls, et al (2018) and Avila and Wray, (2018) have separately advocated the importance of the library and its personnel in collaborative librarianship that can birth the creation of OER.

Though there is still room for further deepening of the roles of the library personnel in OER creation, the current practices show a comfortable level of involvement.

The study also found that the role of the library personnel in OER discoverability is minimal. Even though the staff is actively involved in the redistribution of the available OER materials, little attention is paid to the cataloguing and creation of metadata for these information resources. Equally, these resources are not published under open licenses to enhance discoverability and ultimate accessibility to the resources.

This result aligns with the finding of Otto and Kerres (2022) and Roncovic (2021) that the OER is not properly linked to other open-licensed resources to strengthen the process of discoverability.

The position of Perifanou and Economides (2022) that metadata is often missing in OER has further been corroborated by this study. It is therefore an insight into the cause of the low level of discoverability suffered by the OER resources in the library.

Conclusion

This study has emphasized the inestimable contributions that the library personnel in universities in Osun State are equipped to offer to a growing collection of OER materials in academia.

Even though, the intervention of OER materials in resource redistribution cannot be overemphasized, it is only the collaboration of the relevant stakeholders especially the library personnel that can sustain the tempo and bring the project to fruition.

This study has further laid credence to the underutilization of the potential of library personnel in collaborative activities in academia. It is heartwarming however that the library staff is not completely blacked out.

Their contribution to advocacy, content creation, and discoverability of OER stands to boost the efforts of the faculty in promoting and propagating the adoption, organization, and sustainability of the OER.

The areas such as the inauguration of a consortium for group advocacy, connecting OER materials to open licensed platforms, giving expert advice on copyright issues, and focusing more on metadata creation for OER materials are sore points that require visitation. The libraries and their personnel should organize workshops and training to adequately guide all the personnel involved in this onerous task to further enhance their institutional learning, commitment, and dedication. Also, the integration of OER into repositories is long overdue to make the discoverability attainable.

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