

OPEN ACCESS LITERATURE: PANACEA FOR DWINDLING LIBRARY INFORMATION RESOURCES IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigerian public libraries are facing various challenges that hinder effective and smooth operations, such as under funding and scarcity of current and relevant information resources.. The influx of open information resources offers opportunities for Nigerian public libraries to leverage with. This paper explores the potential of Open Access (OA) literature as a solution to the persistent challenge of inadequate information resources in Nigerian public libraries. The paper highlights the various advantages of OA, including cost savings, enhanced access to diverse and current information, support for education and research, promotion of local scholarship, technological advancements, and community empowerment. By examining strategies for effectively leveraging OA resources, the paper underscores how OA can serve as a panacea for bridging the information gap in Nigerian public libraries. Current and relevant references provide a comprehensive overview of the benefits and implementation of OA literature in the context of Nigerian public libraries. Finally, a conceptual model was proposed on how public libraries can effectively integrate OA.

Keywords: Open Access, Public Libraries, Emerging Technologies, Nigeria,

Introduction

Public libraries are foundational institutions for basic learning, serving entire communities without discrimination. They house a diverse array of information materials for all societal groups and individuals. They enhance access to knowledge, and foster lifelong learning, community development, and independent decision-making (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), 2001; Okafor, 2020). Public libraries are avenues where resources in various formats are systematically organized by professionals to educate, inform, entertain, stimulate individual learning, and advance society as a whole. IFLA (2001) added that public libraries are institutions that are funded by public resources, provide free access to reliable, educational, and informative materials, support self-education and serve as supplementary educational institutions. Public libraries grant free access to their collections to community members pursuing personal, social, and public goals (National Research Council, 2000; American Library Association, 2020).

Public libraries perform various roles including, but not limited to providing access to information and educational tools, facilitating informal self-education, preserving local materials, and strengthening democratic values. Oche and Ogbu, (2020); Okojie and Okiy, (2019), mentioned that in their effort to satisfy the information needs of their communities and promote study and research, public libraries introduce and promote reading programmes. Also, they facilitates learning, and research among their community members through various professional means, such as information search and delivery services. These services provided by public libraries are considered essential for human growth and development. Unfortunately, Nigerian public libraries frequently suffer from outdated collections, as they cannot keep pace with the latest publications and research. Agboola and Oduwale (2019) emphasized that the scarcity of current and relevant information resources severely limits the libraries' capacity to support education and research effectively. This deficiency has led to an increasing information gap, particularly in rural areas where access to information is already limited.

In the current digital age, public libraries are expected to make information resources and services accessible to the community they serve regardless of distance, time or technology constraints. However, the adequacy and relevance of the resources in Nigerian public libraries are increasingly deteriorating due to so many factors such poor infrastructure, dwindling budget allocation, and lack of qualified staff (Salah & Ahmad, 2024). It is therefore imperative for public libraries to exploit avenues that will be used to emancipate them from this worrisome situation. Scholars have suggested the adoption and use of OA resources as very good sources for free and current information resources. While this will be a very good way of salvaging Nigerian public libraries from the challenge of information resources, the authors believes that there have to be strategies for working with OA resources to achieve the desired goal.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to examine the roles of OA as a panacea for dwindling library information resources in public libraries in Nigeria. The concept of OA and its types were discussed briefly. Based on the review of literature, some strategies were recommended for acquiring and using OA in Nigerian public libraries. This paper is significant in providing some insights into the roles of OA in public libraries, especially in developing countries like Nigeria. In other words, most research works on OA revolve around academic libraries. For instance, IFLA (2001) observed that *discussions around open access are often dominated by academic librarians and publishers. But given that open access initiatives are suppose to make research reports available for all, and that it is not only students and researchers attached to an institution that may need access. The public libraries could also have an important role towards making OA information resources accessible to different users in a community.*

Nigerian Public Libraries

Public libraries have existed in Nigeria since the early 20th century. The Tom Jones Library in Lagos and the Lagos Library, established between 1910 and the 1930s, had elements of public library services. During the colonial era, the government established reading rooms across various regions of Nigeria, many of which evolved into public libraries (Aguolu & Aguolu, 1997; Olden, 1985). The growth and development of public libraries in Nigeria received a significant boost from the Ibadan seminar of 1953. This seminar, organized jointly by the Nigerian Government and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), played a pivotal role in shaping the country's library services (iProject, 2018).

Studies have indicated that at the time of Nigeria's independence, each of the three regions had public libraries. With the dissolution of these regions, new state public libraries were set up in the newly established states, providing varying degrees of services (Fuegi, Segbert-Elbert, & Lipeikaite, 2011; Olden, 1985). Despite their small sizes and scarce resources, these libraries have continued to offer traditional services such as book lending. However, they often lack technology-related facilities, which limits their ability to meet modern information needs (Fuegi, Segbert-Elbert, & Lipeikaite, 2011).

Following the emergence and development of information and communication technologies (ICT), some public libraries in Nigeria have acquired and deployed ICT for their housekeeping operations. However, public libraries still face significant challenges. Okojie (2017), notes that many public libraries in Nigeria are unable to meet the informational and educational needs of their communities due to constrained budgets and insufficient resources. This situation is exacerbated by the high costs of subscription-based journals and books, which are beyond the financial reach of many libraries (Folorunso, & Folorunso, 2010). Thus, the dearth of information resources is still a major issue that is affecting the delivery of effective and efficient public library services in Nigeria. A study by Salah and Ahmed (2024) showed that 60% of users are not satisfied with services offered by Kwara State Public Libraries, while 30% of them lack awareness about the available services. In this regard, OA can be integrated to complement the available information resources so that various information needs of members of the communities can be met.

Access to OA resources can cater for the needs of all members of a community irrespective of their political, cultural, occupational, socioeconomic status, education level, or gender differences. A study by Izah (2020) revealed that public libraries in Northern Nigeria serves as veritable tools for attainment of gender equality through access to free information for positive change in personal life and the communities. Based on access to information, the public libraries were able to organized programmes for skills acquisition such as beads making, snacks, oil shampoo, soap, tie and dye, air fresheners/perfumes, and other cosmetics.

Types of Open Access

Open Access (OA) has numerous definitions offered by organizations and individual scholars, though they all converge on the idea of free access to knowledge. For example, Snijder (2019) defines OA as a scholarly work, typically book-length, on a specific topic that is made available online, allowing readers to access and download its content without any barriers. Frederick (2021) further explains that OA grants unlimited access to academic, theoretical, and research literature that is scholarly and peer-reviewed. However, Suber (2019) had discussed three prominent definitions of OA in a more intensive and elaborative way: the Budapest Open Access Initiative (2002), the Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing (2003), and the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities (2003), commonly referred as BBB. According to him, these statements emphasized making research literature freely available online without financial, legal, or technical barriers, except those required for internet access. The definitions stressed that OA literature should allow users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, link to full texts, and use the content lawfully, with the only restriction being proper attribution to the authors. The BBB definition of OA observed by Brunsting, Harrington, and Scott (2022), goes beyond removing price barriers to include permission barriers, moving from gratis OA to libre OA. This means that while the literature is free from most copyright and licensing restrictions, authors still retain control over the integrity of their work and must be properly acknowledged Brunsting, Harrington, & Scott (2022).

OA is classified into various types based on their varying levels of openness and accessibility in the dissemination of scholarly content. Based on their methods of providing access to scholarly materials and the extent of their usability Crawford (2011) outlined four primary categories of OA: green, gold, gratis, and libre. According to him, Green and Gold OA refer to two ways of providing free access to peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles. Green OA entails authors depositing peer-reviewed articles in freely accessible digital repositories, while gold OA involves journals making all peer-reviewed articles freely available online without any fees or registration. Gratis and libre OA cover all freely available materials, including but not limited to peer-reviewed articles. Gratis OA offers free online readability, whereas libre OA extends usability beyond simple reading, ideally encompassing all permissions specified (readable for free online, but possibly no more than that). Summarily the four basic types of OA are:

7. **Green OA:** Involves self-archiving, where authors deposit their peer-reviewed articles in freely accessible digital repositories, either subject-specific or institutional, making them available at no cost.
8. **Gold OA:** Involves journals making all their peer-reviewed articles freely available for online reading immediately upon publication, without any fees or registration.

9. **Gratis OA:** Focuses on the level of accessibility, where materials are freely readable online but come with limited additional rights beyond basic access.
10. **Libre OA:** Extends beyond readability to include additional free usability, such as the right to reuse, redistribute, and modify the material, ideally aligning with the permissions in the Three B statements (Berlin, Bethesda, and Budapest OA declarations).

OA has brought significant benefits to the information sector. The Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI), (2002) noted that before the OA movement, which began in 2002, access to scholarly journals was predominantly fee-based. This access was not only expensive but also increasingly out of reach, even for the largest research universities (Berkeley Library, University of California). In light of these developments, libraries need to devise mechanisms to tap into and make OA literature available to their users. Suber (2012) argues that OA benefits everyone by facilitating research and making its results widely available and useful. OA benefits researchers as readers by helping them find and retrieve necessary information, and it benefits researchers as authors by helping them reach readers who can apply, cite, and build on their work. For non-researchers, OA accelerates research and all the benefits that depend on it, such as new medicines, useful technologies, solved problems, informed decisions, improved policies, and beautiful understanding.

The Budapest Open Access Initiative highlights the benefits of OA, including the acceleration of research, enriching education, sharing knowledge between rich and poor, and increasing the visibility and impact of research findings. OA helps solve the problem of inaccessibility to literature, particularly in developing countries, due to financial constraints (Baruah, 2007; Snijder, 2015). From the foregoing, it is clear that the essence of OA is to facilitate access to scholarly literature for legitimate scholarly uses, with the ultimate goal of making OA the default for new research. This transition is primarily cultural rather than technical, legal, or economic. Any digital content, such as texts, data, images, audio, and video, can be OA, highlighting the versatility and broad applicability of the OA model.

Public Libraries and Open Access

The adoption and use of Open Access (OA) by libraries in Nigeria are essential due to the unsustainable high costs of academic journal subscriptions. Nigerian public libraries face significant budget cuts or even zero allocations, while journal subscription prices continue to escalate. Mullen (2010) emphasizes that OA serves as a relief to libraries as they struggle with financial challenges posed by publisher fees and constant changes in subscriptions. OA journals present a viable alternative to paywall journals, making it crucial for libraries to invest in supporting the discovery and utilization of OA literature, which offers a wealth of freely available materials.

A key challenge is the effective integration, organization, and presentation of OA literature for users. The role of librarians is shifting from a traditional subscription model - where libraries purchased or licensed content for users and acted as gatekeepers, to a model where all research is openly accessible. According to Oberländer and Reimer (2019), this transition requires libraries to move from content licensing and dissemination to facilitating and supporting the publishing process, necessitating fundamental changes in structures, tasks, and skills. Scholars recommend various measures for integrating OA literature into library services. This means readiness of public libraries towards integration of OA is very crucial for the success and sustainability of the project. Hence, Mullen (2010) suggests that libraries should organize the vast amount of scholarly information on the web and provide users with access to free resources, including integrating web-based search engines like Google Scholar that index OA journals and repositories. Additionally, the Association of European Research Libraries (2019) advises incorporating OA literature into regular acquisition workflows, indexing relevant OA titles in library catalogues and discovery systems, and developing OA policy documents to support integration (Anyira & Idubor, 2018).

Sensitization and training are indispensable for integrating OA in Nigerian public libraries. Suber (2012) emphasizes that librarians are vital stakeholders in creating and promoting institutional repositories (IR) within their institutions. In other words, librarians can advance OA by guiding users on how to locate OA journals and archives relevant to their fields and by including OA journals in their catalogues. The librarians should also set up institutional repositories to assist researchers and scholars in archiving their research papers, digitizing older papers as needed. Furthermore, librarians should communicate with other libraries about existing IRs, particularly through collaborative services among libraries.

A critical step in leveraging OA literature is the development of robust digital collections. Nigerian public libraries can collaborate with OA platforms and publishers to curate and integrate high-quality OA materials into their collections. Such partnerships ensure a steady influx of valuable resources, enhancing the library's offerings. Okoroma (2019) emphasizes that curations with academic institutions and research organizations can further augment the availability and quality of OA resources, providing patrons with access to a diverse array of scholarly works (Brunsting, Harrington, & Scott, 2022). *It is already a well-known fact, that due to rapid advances in technologies, libraries including the public type, are faced with information explosion. Thus, the phenomenon of information explosion had necessitated public libraries to embrace new roles. The new roles of public libraries as enumerated by Oche and Ogbu (2021) includes:*

- *Knowledge Management,*
- *Adaption of modern approaches to library services,*
- *Expansion of collection development and digitization of information resources,*

- *Work in partnership with other organizations and individuals for collaborative activities, and*
- *Use of advanced technological tools to facilitate access to information.*

In view of the new roles stated above, equipping library staff with the necessary skills to manage and utilize open access (OA) resources is crucial. This suggests that, the delivery of effective and efficient services in public libraries will require new policies, advance ICT infrastructure, subject specialists librarians, and community engagement for funding and other support. So with good planning and developed strategies, integration of OA to boost the public library information resources should not be seen as additional cost but rather a means of adding value to the library resources and services. Most importantly, the public libraries in Nigeria still need to ensure its users' engagement by creating a balance between the traditional/conventional roles and the new ones. According to Oche and Ogbu (2021), the traditional roles of the public libraries that are still relevant include:

- *Serving as gateway to knowledge for the community,*
- *Providing resources and services for the overall development of members of the society,*
- *Serving as centre for self-education and lifelong learning,*
- *Serving as information and recreation centre,*
- *Serving as cultural centre and other events of public interest.*

Comprehensive training and professional development will enhance library staff digital literacy and information management capabilities, covering the use of OA platforms, integration of OA materials, and promotion to users (Chan, Zhang, Vermeij, & Riemer, 2024). Simultaneously, raising awareness and promoting OA resources among library patrons is essential. Libraries can implement outreach programs, information literacy initiatives, and use workshops, seminars, and online tutorials to educate users about OA advantages and access methods. Furthermore, providing technological support, including computer terminals, reliable internet connections, and guidance, is vital to ensure seamless access and utilization of OA literature by patrons (IFLA Library Policy and Advocacy, 2018).

Proposed Conceptual Model of Open Access Literature Integration

The integration of Open Access (OA) literature in libraries is crucial for enhancing research and learning, yet its adoption remains in its infancy. To address this, the Model of OA integration proposed by Anyira and Idubor (2018) has been refined and is presented below to improve the integration process in our libraries. Given the vast amount of OA literature and the different types of libraries, the first step in this model is user analysis. This step is essential for understanding the information needs of library users. Based on these needs, libraries will source relevant literature from available OA resources, including

institutional repositories (IR). The final step involves organizing and making the retrieved OA literature accessible for use.

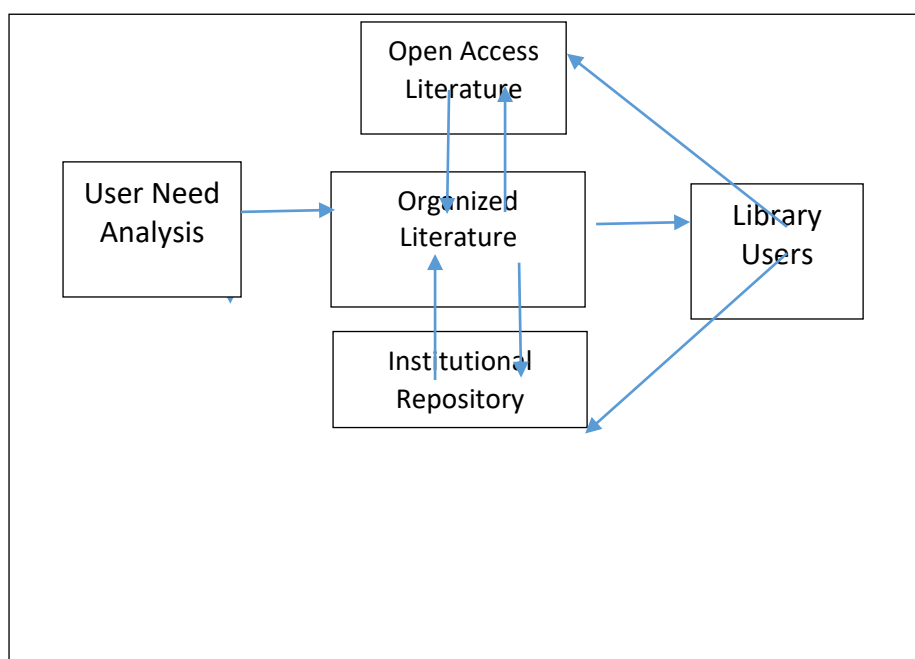


Figure 1:
Proposed

Conceptual Model of Open Access Literature Integration

Libraries should facilitate making literature free as OA to their users particularly in academic environment. The literature should either be locally deposited as IR or published openly in various available open access databases.

Challenges

The challenges to the adoption and integration of OA literature by libraries are many. According to Anyira and Idubor (2018, 225), there is a lack of awareness of OA literature among librarians, and a lack of a well-written collection development policy that will guide how libraries will integrate OA literature in their services or as part of their collections. Other challenges are unwillingness or resistance to change on the part of the librarians, poor internet access/low bandwidths, lack of knowledge and skills required for OA integration, and lack of management support for improved library services.

Conclusion

Open Access literature holds significant potential to address the information resource challenges faced by Nigerian public libraries. By offering cost-effective, diverse, and easily accessible information, OA literature can significantly support education, research, and community empowerment. However, to fully realize these benefits, libraries must adopt strategic approaches that promote the integration and use of OA resources. Through effective

implementation and management, Nigerian public libraries can leverage OA literature to bridge the information gap and enhance their services and impact on their communities.

Recommendations

Open Access literature is now in abundance and it cuts across various types of literature, including journals and books. OA is very important in solving the problem of lack of literature in libraries. Based on the reviewed literature, it is recommended that librarians need to seek more knowledge on:

1. OA literature and their various types
2. Skills on how to access, retrieve and organize various OA literature for use.
3. Facilitate in the setting up IR in their various institutions
4. Publishing in OA journals by members of their communities
5. Formulate policies on OA use

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