NAVIGATING THE OPEN ACCESS LANDSCAPE: COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS FROM ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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Abstract

This paper examines the evolving role of academic libraries in the digital age, with a focus on the rise and impact of the Open Access (OA) movement. As rising costs and budget limitations hinder access to scholarly resources, OA provides a new model for making research outputs freely available online, especially in developing countries. The study reviews existing research to analyze how libraries and institutions are adopting OA through strategies such as institutional repositories, digital licensing, and faculty engagement. It highlights both the opportunities—such as increased research visibility and cross-border collaboration—and the persistent challenges, including low OA awareness, limited funding, and academic reward systems that favor traditional publishing. The paper also discusses the central advocacy and educational roles of librarians in promoting OA among faculty and students. By comparing initiatives across different national contexts, this research underscores the importance of Capacity building and policy support in achieving sustainable and equitable access to knowledge. The findings suggest that while significant progress has been made, further efforts are needed to address cultural, technical, and institutional barriers to fully realize the benefits of OA in higher education.

Keywords: Open Access, Institutional Repositories, Academic Libraries, Scholarly Communication, Faculty Engagement, Library Advocacy, Developing Countries, Digital Collections

1. Introduction

In the digital age, access to information is transforming the way scholars, students, and academic institutions engage with knowledge. Open Access (OA) has emerged as a global movement aiming to remove barriers to academic resources, ensuring that scholarly literature is freely available online to all. With rising costs of journal subscriptions, limited budgets, and the growing need for accessible information, OA has become essential to assist academic research, teaching, and learning.

The traditional publishing model often restricts access to publicly funded research by placing it behind paywalls. This has triggered global advocacy for OA by libraries, universities, and scholars who believe that information, especially that which is publicly funded, should be shared openly. Jain (2012). Institutions worldwide have developed OA policies, launched institutional repositories, and encouraged faculty to self-archive their work.

Academic libraries are at the forefront of this transition. As noted by Levine-Clark (2014), modern academic libraries have shifted from being mere collectors of printed books to facilitators of digital knowledge. Today's libraries aim to provide access to 'everything'—not just owned collections, but also licensed, shared, or freely available resources. This shift has made it possible for libraries to deliver broader access, even if it comes at the expense of long-term ownership rights.

In Turkey, as Cimen (2012), highlights, libraries have proactively participated in national OA initiatives since 2005, setting up institutional repositories and fostering collaboration among stakeholders. Similarly, in Pakistan, OA has been identified as a solution to limited library budgets and rising subscription costs as explained by Sultan and Rafiq (2021). The adoption of OA has also improved the global visibility of research and enhanced collaboration across borders.

However, despite these developments, challenges persist. Cullen and Chawner (2011) found that many academics still prefer traditional publishing venues due to institutional reward systems tied to high-impact journals. Librarians, meanwhile, continue to face resistance from both faculty and students who are unfamiliar with OA models or question the quality of OA publications.

Recent efforts have focused on promoting OA literacy, especially among students. Keane (2012) emphasizes the importance of educating undergraduates and graduates about OA publishing principles, rights to information, and how OA benefits their academic futures. These efforts are necessary to build a generation of researchers who view OA not just as an option, but as a scholarly responsibility.

Given the evolving landscape of scholarly communication, it is essential to examine how open access is being perceived, implemented, and promoted across different academic contexts. This literature review examines several studies and institutional efforts that have influenced the global discourse on open access in higher education.

The only objective of this research was to explore and understand the OA resources, movement and their different aspects.

2.   Review of Literature

The transformation of academic libraries in the digital era has significantly redefined their role from content custodians to access facilitators. Historically grounded in physical collections, academic libraries are now increasingly oriented toward digital access models. According to Levine-Clark (2014), this evolution is shaped by a shift from ownership of materials to strategic licensing, allowing institutions to provide access to a wider range of resources while managing costs. Though this model enhances content availability for current users, it limits perpetual access and long-term archival capabilities, raising critical concerns about preservation.

In parallel, the Open Access (OA) movement has emerged as a vital component of modern scholarly communication. Cullen and Chawner (2011) examine the development of institutional repositories as part of OA infrastructure, noting that these repositories offer enhanced visibility for academic output. However, despite the theoretical benefits, the academic community has shown reluctance to fully engage with the OA system. Factors such as the established reward mechanisms in academia, which prioritize traditional peer-reviewed publishing for tenure and recognition, contribute to low deposit rates in institutional repositories.

The case of Turkey, as studied by Cimen (2012), provides a national perspective on OA implementation. Turkish academic institutions have taken significant steps since 2005 to develop OA policies, institutional repositories, and collaborative frameworks through organizations like the Anatolian University Libraries Consortium - ANKOS. Despite initial resistance and logistical hurdles, these coordinated efforts have led to a notable increase in the number of OA journals and the visibility of Turkish scholarly output.

The role of librarians in advocating for OA has also gained prominence. Keane (2012) highlights those librarians, particularly in academic settings, recognize their responsibility to promote OA awareness among students and faculty. While some librarians actively educate users about OA publishing and copyright issues, institutional uncertainty and the perceived risk associated with OA publishing often obstruct broader adoption. Nevertheless, librarians continue to play an essential role in fostering awareness and integrating OA principles into academic culture.

Regionally, in the context of Pakistan, Sultan and Rafiq (2021) conducted a study to assess OA awareness and engagement among university libraries. Their findings indicate a relatively high level of awareness of OA initiatives such as the HEC-National Digital Library and the Pakistan Research Repository. However, key challenges identified include inadequate infrastructure, limited human resources, and skepticism regarding the quality of OA content. Despite these issues, librarians acknowledged OA as a strategic solution to budget constraints and as a means of increasing the institutional value of libraries.

Jain (2012) offers a broader view of OA's significance for developing countries, emphasizing that OA helps bridge the information divide by enabling equitable access to scholarly knowledge. Researcher argues that although OA is not cost-free—since costs are often borne by authors or institutions—it represents a sustainable publishing model. OA enhances global research visibility, promotes collaborative scholarship, and aligns with libraries' mission of facilitating knowledge dissemination.

The reviewed literature shows that Open Access has made notable progress worldwide, but its adoption is uneven. Countries like India and Turkey have made structured efforts through national policies and platforms, while others like Pakistan and West African nations are still developing awareness and infrastructure. Japan's case highlights the need for stronger incentives and coordination. The studies agree that institutional repositories are key to OA

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success, but they must be supported by training, policy, and academic engagement. Moving forward, academic libraries and national bodies will play a vital role in making OA sustainable and impactful.

In conclusion, the literature underscores that academic libraries are actively negotiating their roles in the changing landscape of scholarly communication. While the transition to digital access models and OA frameworks presents challenges—particularly around funding, awareness, and academic incentives—there is also strong evidence of innovation, collaboration, and policy development aimed at fostering equitable access to knowledge.

3.   Methodology:

To explore and understand the OA movement and its different aspects content analysis of a few selected literature was done.

Table 1: Comparative Overview of Open Access Literature: Methodology and Themes

Author	Year	Methodology	Key Themes
Cullen & Chawner	2011	Survey	Academic reluctance; IR underuse; conflicting paradigms
Cimen	2012	Descriptive/Experience-based	OA in Turkey; institutional repositories; national policy support
Jain	2012	Literature Review	Global OA advocacy; role of libraries; access equity
Keane	2012	Online Survey	Librarian attitudes; OA instruction for students; institutional hesitation
Levine-Clark	2014	Conceptual Analysis	Shift to access model; licensing; digital transition; discovery tools
Sultan & Rafiq	2021	Quantitative Survey	Awareness, challenges (infrastructure), opportunities (cost-saving)

The comprehensive analysis of Table 1 examines six seminal studies that have shaped our understanding of open access implementation in academic libraries at different geographical places. The table presents a diverse methodological landscape spanning conceptual analysis, descriptive studies, surveys, and literature reviews, each contributing unique perspectives on the evolving Open Access paradigm.

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Open Access and Library Automation Initiatives in Selected Asian and West African Higher-Education Contexts

Research Paper Title	Geographical Focus	Key Themes	Findings / Highlights	Recommendations / Solutions
Exploring Trends in Open Access Repositories: Nigeria, Ghana, Cabo Verde, Senegal	West Africa	Open Access (OA), Institutional Repositories (IR), Higher Education	Nigeria leads in number and growth of OA repositories (21 by 2019). Ghana (5), Cabo Verde and Senegal (2 each). Huge gap in resource availability (Nigeria: 51,762 vs. Senegal: 400). Common subjects: Multidisciplinary, LIS, Technology, Politics.	Need for awareness campaigns. Increase institutional involvement. Encourage local digitization of research.
Research on Open Access Resources in Libraries of Sports	China	Open Access (OA) in Sports Education, Resource	OA resolves high journal costs and limited budgets. Platforms like DOAJ, Socolar, Open DOAR are widely used. Sports colleges rarely participate in	Promote awareness through library events. Create physical education-specific OA navigation systems.

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Colleges		Integration, Library Services	OA (only 1 user in Socolar). Low awareness among librarians and users.	Train librarians in OA resource handling.
Status Quo and Issues of Open Access at Japanese Universities	Japan	OA Policies, Institutional Repositories, Government Mandates	Japan has 145 IRs but low awareness of OA among faculty. Mandatory OA of PhD theses since 2013 caused confusion. Departmental bulletins form bulk of OA content (54%). Gold OA adoption is rising (Japan OA article rate ~12%).	Government should enhance faculty awareness. Improve incentives for green OA. Strengthen IR systems with clearer mandates and support.
System Requirements and Development of Open Source for Library Automation in Laos PDR	Laos	Library Automation, Open-Source Software, Education Access	389 schools and 23 colleges lacked automation systems. PMB program used in national libraries; not scalable. Open Biblio chosen as best fit (supports Lao language). Developed prototype with 6 modules + Lao interoperability.	Train librarians and staff on automation software. Expand implementation to all colleges. Encourage government support for national-scale rollout.

Table 2 analyzes four academic studies on Open Access (OA) and Library Systems in different countries. It highlights the evolving landscape of library technology and open access implementation across different global regions. The research encompasses West African open access repository development, specialized library services in China, institutional policy frameworks in Japan, and automated library system development in Laos, revealing both convergent challenges and diverse regional approaches to information access enhancement.

Table 3: Challenges and Gaps in Open Access and Library Automation: A Comparative Overview

Country	What Was Studied	What Was Found	What's Missing / What's Needed
West Africa	Institutional Repositories (IRs) in Higher Education	Nigeria has the highest number of IRs (21), while other countries have very few. Total OA content differs widely across the region.	Awareness is low. Many institutions lack their own repositories. There is a need for stronger support and digitization efforts.
China (Sports Colleges)	Use of Open Access resources in sports education libraries	Numerous platforms such as DOAJ and Socolar exist, but sports libraries make little use of them.	Sports libraries require training, improved OA collection, and better navigation tools for effective usage.
Japan	National-level OA policies and scholarly publishing	Government mandates, like PhD theses OA, are in place, but researchers' awareness remains low. IRs often hold internal publications, not journals.	Faculty motivation and training to self-archive are needed; Green OA adoption still lacks momentum.
Laos	Development of an open-source library automation system	Most educational institutions lack system automation. Open Biblio was created to address this, supporting Lao language and resource sharing.	More funding, broader implementation, librarian training, and regular system updates are essential for success.

Table 3 highlights both progress and ongoing challenges in open access and library automation initiatives across West Africa, China, Japan, and Laos. In West Africa, there is clear disparity, with Nigeria significantly ahead in

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establishing institutional repositories, while neighboring countries face low awareness and minimal repository infrastructure. Similarly, Chinese sports colleges underutilize available open access platforms due to insufficient training and lack of tailored resources, pointing to the need for targeted librarian education and specialized tools. Japan's robust policy framework mandates open access, but widespread researcher disengagement limits the impact, revealing that awareness and motivation are as important as policy. In Laos, bespoke open-source systems are being introduced to address foundational automation gaps, but the success of such initiatives is hampered by limited funding and a need for ongoing staff training. Across all regions, the findings emphasize that technological solutions must be accompanied by sustained investment in human capacity and institutional culture to be effective.

4. The studies collectively highlight several recurring themes across diverse regional contexts:

4.1 Low Awareness of OA Concepts:

A notable barrier in Japan, West Africa, and Chinese sports colleges is the limited understanding of OA principles. Faculty, librarians, and institutions either lack knowledge about OA or do not actively participate in related initiatives.

4.2 Financial Limitations:

All four studies underscore financial challenges as a significant obstacle. Institutions in Laos, West Africa, and China's sports colleges struggle with restricted budgets and high journal subscription costs, limiting their ability to access and implement OA resources.

4.3 Open Source and Institutional Solutions:

Open-source solutions, such as Open Library Management System in Laos, demonstrate cost-effectiveness and adaptability. Institutional repositories (IRs) also emerge as the favored approach for implementing green OA models in multiple regions.

4.4 Need for Capacity Building:

Training and capacity building are universal recommendations. Improving librarians' and faculty's skills in using OA tools is essential, with awareness-raising consistently identified as the critical first step toward successful adoption.

4.5 Policy Support is Key:

Government support, as seen in Japan through national mandates, plays a vital role in advancing OA. The lack of strong, supportive policies in other regions presents a significant gap, suggesting the need for wider policy engagement.

This synthesis of cross-cutting themes underscores both common challenges and shared opportunities for improving access to knowledge globally.

5. Conclusion:

The shift towards Open Access (OA) has fundamentally changed how academic libraries

support research, teaching, and learning in the digital era. OA initiatives have made it possible for scholars, students, and the wider public to access scholarly information without barriers, enabling broader dissemination and use of research findings. Institutional repositories, in particular, help improve the visibility and impact of academic work by making research outputs available online, promoting global collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Despite these advances, several challenges remain. Limited awareness of OA concepts, especially among faculty and students, often restricts the full use of OA resources. Traditional academic reward systems still prioritize publishing in subscription-based journals, creating hesitation among researchers to embrace OA models. Moreover, financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and concerns about the quality of OA publications continue to affect the adoption and sustainability of OA practices, particularly in developing regions.

Academic libraries have emerged as active leaders in advocating for OA.

Librarians play a crucial role in raising awareness, educating users, and guiding the development of institutional repositories and OA policies. These efforts help overcome misconceptions and support the integration of OA into academic culture. However, ongoing capacity building, including training and policy support, is essential to address technical, cultural, and institutional barriers.

Going forward, the success of OA in academic libraries depends on continued investment in infrastructure, stronger collaboration among stakeholders, and persistent advocacy for supportive policies at both institutional and national levels. By prioritizing these areas, academic libraries can further strengthen their mission of enabling equitable access to knowledge and help bridge the global information divide.

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