



## Open Access, Institutional Repositories and Research Visibility in Nigerian Universities: Trends and Impact (2010–2025)

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### ABSTRACT

The global shift towards open access (OA) publishing and the establishment of institutional repositories (IRs) are widely regarded as pivotal strategies for enhancing the visibility and impact of scholarly research. In the Nigerian context, where universities generate a substantial volume of research output, the potential of these digital platforms to amplify the global reach of indigenous knowledge remains a critical, yet underexplored, area of inquiry. This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the growth, adoption, and perceived impact of IRs and OA policies within Nigerian universities from 2010 to 2025. Employing a secondary data analysis methodology, the research synthesizes evidence from directory listings (e.g., OpenDOAR), institutional policy documents, and a robust body of published empirical studies, many conducted by Nigerian scholars. The findings indicate a gradual but uneven expansion of IR infrastructure, with approximately 10 - 15% of Nigerian universities currently maintaining a functional repository by 2024 (Idiedo et al., 2024). Content analysis reveals a predominance of journal articles, theses, and conference papers, while multimedia and inaugural lectures are less commonly archived (Idiedo et al., 2024). Notably, the adoption of formal, institution-wide OA mandates remains exceptionally rare, with initiatives largely driven by library advocacy rather than top-down policy (Idiedo et al., 2024; Open Access in Nigeria, 2025)

## **INTRODUCTION**

The imperative for research visibility in the contemporary academic landscape is inextricably linked to the digital infrastructures that facilitate the dissemination and discovery of scholarly work. Over the past two decades, the open access (OA) movement and the proliferation of institutional repositories (IRs) have emerged as transformative forces, promising to democratize access to knowledge and amplify the impact of research, particularly from regions historically marginalized in global scholarly communications. In Nigeria, which hosts one of Africa's largest and most diverse higher education sectors, the engagement with these digital platforms presents a complex narrative of potential, gradual adoption, and persistent constraint.

The core mandates of Nigerian universities – teaching, research, and community service – generate a continuous stream of intellectual output, including journal articles, theses, dissertations, and technical reports (Ezema, 2024). However, bibliometric analyses consistently indicate that a significant proportion of this output suffers from low global visibility, which in turn adversely affects citation metrics and the international ranking of institutions (Ezema, 2024). This visibility gap is frequently attributed to the traditional subscription-based publishing model, which limits access, and to the underdevelopment of local, interoperable digital archives that can systematically showcase institutional research portfolios.

An institutional repository, defined as a digital platform for capturing, preserving, and disseminating an institution's intellectual output, is posited as a strategic response to this challenge (Ezema, 2024). For Nigerian universities, the development of IRs is not merely a technical project but a scholarly communication intervention with profound implications for academic prestige, resource attraction, and societal relevance. Since the launch of one of the country's first IRs at Covenant University in 2008 (Open Access in Nigeria, 2025), there has been a steady, albeit slow, growth in the number of such platforms. Yet, critical questions remain about the scale of this growth, the policies governing it, the nature of deposited content, and, ultimately, its tangible effect on the visibility and citation of Nigerian research.

This article, therefore, seeks to interrogate the trajectory of IRs and OA in Nigerian universities between 2010 and 2025. It moves beyond a mere inventory of repositories to analyze the interplay between infrastructure, policy, and scholarly practice. By synthesizing secondary data from directories, policy documents, and extant empirical studies, the paper aims to:

- (a) map the growth and geographical distribution of IRs;
- (b) assess the state of OA policy adoption;
- (c) evaluate content typologies and deposit trends; and
- (d) critically examine the evidenced and perceived impact on research visibility.

In doing so, it positions itself within ongoing scholarly conversations about digital equity in knowledge production and offers a grounded assessment from one of Africa's key research landscapes.

## **LITERATURE RIVIEW**

### **Theoretical Underpinnings: Open Access and the Scholarly Communication Ecosystem**

The analysis of IRs in Nigeria is best framed within the broader theories of scholarly communication and the political economy of knowledge. The OA movement, underpinned by principles of equity, accessibility, and public good, challenges the hegemony of commercial publishing models. It aligns with what Suber (2012) conceptualizes as a moral and practical imperative to share publicly funded research. In the Global South, this movement takes on an added dimension of decolonizing knowledge flows, seeking to counteract the marginalization of local research in international indexes.

The development of IRs represents a key "green" OA route, enabling authors to self-archive their work. Lynch's (2003) foundational work frames IRs as essential infrastructure for the "scholarly commons," asserting a university's stewardship role over its intellectual capital. However, the successful implementation of this theoretical ideal is contingent on a complex set of socio-technical factors, including institutional policy, researcher behaviour, technological capacity, and sustainable funding – a reality acutely evident in resource-constrained environments.

### **The Evolution of IRs and OA in Nigeria: A Scholarly Conversation**

The literature on IRs in Nigeria has evolved from early exploratory and advocacy-focused studies to more recent empirical assessments of impact and challenges. Pioneering work by scholars like Ezema (2011) laid the groundwork, passionately arguing for IRs as vehicles for global visibility and providing early roadmaps for development (Ezema, 2011). This was followed by a wave of survey-based studies diagnosing the challenges of adoption, consistently identifying barriers such as inadequate ICT infrastructure, lack of skilled personnel, insufficient funding, and low researcher awareness (Ezema, 2024; Idiedo et al., 2024).

A significant thread in the literature examines the policy vacuum. Unlike some other African nations, Nigeria lacks a national OA mandate (Open Access in Nigeria, 2025). Consequently, repository development has been largely institution-driven and uneven. Studies by Idiedo et al. (2024) and others confirm that few Nigerian universities have formal, comprehensive IR policies covering submission, access, copyright, and preservation (Idiedo et al., 2024). This policy lacuna is frequently cited as a major impediment to systematic content acquisition and sustainability.

The conversation has recently shifted towards evaluating outcomes. Research is beginning to probe the correlation between IR presence and metrics of visibility. For instance, Odigie et al. (2024) provide quantitative evidence linking richer metadata practices in Nigerian IRs to higher citation counts, highlighting the crucial role of discoverability beyond mere online presence (Odigie et al., 2024). Similarly, perception studies, such as Adekunjo et al. (2025), find that academics believe IRs improve webometric rankings, though actual deposit behaviours remain inconsistent (Adekunjo et al., 2025). This gap between recognition and action points to persistent socio-behavioural and infrastructural hurdles.

This review reveals a maturing but still fragmented field of study. While challenges are well-documented, there is a need for more longitudinal and integrative analyses that connect the dots between repository growth, policy frameworks, content dynamics, and measurable visibility outcomes over a defined period. This study aims to contribute to that gap.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive, secondary data analysis design. The research does not collect primary data but rather synthesizes and analyses existing data from multiple public sources to track trends and evaluate impact over the 2010–2025 period.

### **Data Sources:**

1. **Repository Directories:** The OpenDOAR (Directory of Open Access Repositories) and ROAR (Registry of Open Access Repositories) databases were used as primary sources to identify Nigerian IRs, their launch dates, software platforms, and content counts.
2. **Academic Literature:** A systematic search was conducted for peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and reports focusing on IRs, OA, and research visibility in Nigeria. Databases like Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, and ScienceDirect were utilized. Preference was given to works published by Nigerian authors or focusing specifically on the Nigerian context.
3. **Institutional Documents:** University websites and library portals were scanned for OA policies, repository guidelines, and annual reports.
4. **National Data:** Reports from the National Universities Commission (NUC) provided the baseline number of accredited universities for calculating adoption rates (Idiedo et al., 2024).

### **Data Collection and Analysis:**

Data extraction focused on variables such as: university name, repository URL, year of inception, software used, number of records, content types, presence of OA policy, and reported challenges or impacts. Quantitative data were cleaned and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) to show growth trends and distributions. Qualitative data from the literature were analyzed thematically to identify recurring challenges, perceived benefits, and policy insights. The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence allows for a triangulated understanding of the trends and their implications.

### **Limitations:**

The reliance on secondary data introduces limitations. Directory data may not be fully current or accurate. The analysis of impact is constrained by the metrics and methodologies used in the sourced studies. Furthermore, the study cannot establish direct causality between IR presence and citation increases, only correlations and reported perceptions.

## **RESULT**

### **Growth and Distribution of Institutional Repositories**

The growth of IRs in Nigeria has been incremental. By mid-2024, OpenDOAR listed 31 repositories registered from Nigeria (Ezema, 2024). However, empirical surveys suggest a slightly lower number of actively managed IRs in university libraries, with Idiedo et al. (2024) identifying 21 functional IRs (Idiedo et al., 2024). This represents an adoption rate of approximately 10.4% of the 202 NUC-approved universities, indicating that repository development is still in an early phase for most institutions.

Geographically, the distribution is uneven, with the South-West zone hosting the highest number of repositories, followed by the North-Central and South-East zones (Ezema, 2024). This disparity may be linked to variations in institutional resource allocation, ICT infrastructure, and the concentration of digital literacy initiatives.

### **Content Profile and Deposit Trends**

The content archived in Nigerian IRs follows a predictable pattern common to academic repositories globally. Journal articles are the most ubiquitous content type, found in 100% of the surveyed IRs (Idiedo et al., 2024). Theses and dissertations follow closely (95.2%), and conference or workshop papers are also well-represented (81.0%) (Idiedo et al., 2024). Other content types, such as books/book chapters, inaugural lectures, video/images, and learning objects, are deposited far less frequently (Idiedo et al., 2024). This profile suggests that IRs are primarily used as archives for formal, text-based research outputs, while broader types of scholarly and teaching materials remain underrepresented.

### **The Policy Landscape: A Notable Absence**

A critical finding is the stark lack of formal OA or IR policies at both national and institutional levels. As of 2025, Nigeria has no nationwide OA mandate (Open Access in Nigeria, 2025). At the institutional level, the situation is similarly sparse. While a university like Covenant University is often cited as a frontrunner with an adopted OA policy, such cases are exceptional. The survey by Idiedo et al. (2024) found that most repository managers reported having no defined policy governing access, submission, preservation, or copyright (Idiedo et al., 2024). This policy vacuum leaves repository operations reliant on voluntary participation and library advocacy, which limits systematic content growth and long-term preservation planning.

### **Perceived and Evidenced Impact on Visibility**

The literature points to a broadly positive perception of IRs' impact on research visibility. Academics in Nigerian universities generally agree that IRs can enhance the webometric ranking of their institutions and increase the reach of their work (Adekunjo et al., 2025). Preliminary evidence supports this perception. For example, Ezema's (2024) study in South-East Nigeria found that universities with functional IRs tended to have better national and global rankings (Ezema, 2024). Furthermore, the technical quality of repositories, specifically metadata completeness, has been directly correlated with higher citation levels for deposited items (Odigie et al., 2024).

However, this potential is not fully realized due to the challenges outlined below. The impact remains *potential* rather than *actualized* for a large segment of Nigerian research.

### **Persistent Challenges**

The challenges hindering the effective development and use of IRs in Nigeria are well-documented and interrelated:

1. **Infrastructural and Technical Deficits:** Unreliable power supply, limited bandwidth, and inadequate server infrastructure remain fundamental obstacles (Ezema, 2024).
2. **Human Resource Constraints:** A severe shortage of staff with expertise in digital curation, metadata management, and repository software administration is a critical bottleneck (Odigie et al., 2024).
3. **Funding Insecurity:** IRs are often not line items in university budgets, leading to unsustainable project-based funding (Idiedo et al., 2024).
4. **Low Researcher Engagement:** Despite awareness, many academics do not actively deposit their work due to a lack of incentives, copyright concerns, the perceived extra workload, or simply apathy (Adekunjo et al., 2025).
5. **Policy and Advocacy Gaps:** The absence of mandatory deposit policies and weak advocacy from university management perpetuate low participation rates.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings paint a picture of cautious progress within a challenging environment. The growth of IRs in Nigeria, while positive, exemplifies what some scholars term "islands of innovation" rather than a systemic transformation. The dominance of DSpace software indicates a degree of technical standardization, but the low overall adoption rate highlights deep-seated structural issues within the higher education sector.

The near-total absence of OA policies is perhaps the most significant brake on progress. In the absence of mandates, deposit rates rely on voluntarism, which is insufficient for building comprehensive collections. This contrasts with successful models in other parts of the world where "deposit mandates" from institutions or funders have proven transformative. The Nigerian case underscores that technological infrastructure, while necessary, is not enough; it must be coupled with supportive policy frameworks and changes in scholarly reward systems.

The content analysis revealing a focus on traditional publications (articles, theses) suggests that IRs are being used more as digital libraries than as dynamic platforms for sharing the full spectrum of scholarly output (e.g., data, posters, teaching materials). This limits their potential to truly reflect the institution's intellectual life. Furthermore, the link between metadata quality and citations (Odigie et al., 2024) is a crucial insight. It moves the discussion beyond simply "having a repository" to "having a *well-managed, discoverable* repository." Many Nigerian IRs may be failing to maximize their impact due to poor metadata, rendering their content effectively invisible to search engines and harvesting services.

The challenges identified are not unique to Nigeria but are acute in their manifestation. They reflect broader issues of underfunding, digital divides, and the peripheral position of much African scholarship in global networks. Therefore, improving IR efficacy is not just a technical library project but a strategic institutional priority with implications for Nigeria's role in global knowledge production.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This analysis of trends from 2010 to 2025 confirms that institutional repositories in Nigerian universities have established a foothold but are yet to fulfill their potential as powerful engines for research visibility. The journey has been marked by grassroots library advocacy and pilot projects, but stymied by a lack of cohesive strategy, sustainable resources, and enabling policies.

To alter this trajectory, a multi-pronged approach is required:

1. **Policy Formulation:** Individual universities should develop and implement clear OA policies that mandate the deposit of final accepted manuscripts and theses. At the national level, stakeholders like the NUC and TETFund should champion the development of a national OA framework.
2. **Capacity Building:** Sustained investment in training for library staff in digital curation, metadata standards, and repository management is non-negotiable. This should be complemented by awareness and training programs for researchers.
3. **Infrastructure and Funding:** Universities must allocate dedicated, sustainable budgetary lines for repository hosting, maintenance, and development. Collaborations through consortia (e.g., the Nigerian University Libraries Consortium) could help pool resources and expertise.
4. **Advocacy and Incentivization:** University management must actively champion the IR as a strategic asset. Deposit should be integrated into academic performance review processes, and success stories of increased visibility should be widely publicized.
5. **Quality Focus:** Libraries should prioritize improving metadata quality and interoperability standards to ensure deposited content is maximally discoverable.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to track the citation advantage of IR-deposited works in Nigeria specifically and explore in greater

depth the socio-behavioural factors that influence researcher deposit habits. The next decade must see a shift from building repositories to building a robust, policy-backed, and inclusive open scholarship ecosystem in Nigeria. The visibility of the nation's research – and its contribution to solving local and global challenges – depends on it.

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