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BRIDGING THE SKILLS GAP OF LIBRARIANS' READINESS FOR OPEN ACCESS TOOL ADOPTION IN ACADEMIC LIBRARY CONSORTIA

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Abstract
This study investigates how academic library consortia leverage open access (OA) tools to bridge digital skills gaps, focusing on librarian awareness and readiness. Developing digital skills is not only a requirement for deploying platforms like DOAJ, DSpace, and OJS, but it is also fundamental to solving these literacy challenges. Although Open Access resources are increasingly available, technological readiness and professional capacity building remain the most critical challenges for librarians, particularly in developing nations. This qualitative study examines how librarians understand, prepare for, and navigate the challenges of integrating open access (OA) tools within library science. The study sampled 50 academic librarians across five federal and five state universities in South-western Nigeria. Participants were purposively selected based on their experience in digital resource management and consortium activities. Semi-structured interviews gathered data on skills, training, policy, and institutional support. Research indicates that while library professionals in African tertiary institutions are highly knowledgeable about open access (OA) models, they are frequently constrained by a lack of technical expertise and organizational backing. To establish viable OA frameworks, this paper underscores the need for tailored training programs, synchronized institutional frameworks, and enhanced partnerships across library networks.

Keywords: Academic Library Consortia, Librarians' Readiness for Open Access Tools Adoption, Skill Gaps, Technology Adoption.

Introduction

By increasing research visibility and accessibility through digital platforms, repositories, and open journals, Open Access (OA) has become central to academic publishing. Academic librarians play a vital role in executing open access initiatives. They manage institutional repositories, lead open publishing efforts, advice on copyright and licensing, and amplify the reach of research (Abdu et al. 2025). Hence, the utility of open access tools relies not only on technological infrastructure but also on the digital literacy competencies of librarians. Recent studies reveal that while Nigerian universities have advanced in developing institutional repositories and open science, tool implementation remains uneven. This inconsistency stems

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from infrastructure deficits, policy gaps, limited digital competencies, and insufficient technical support for librarians (Funom & Godwin, 2026; Idiedo et al. 2024).

Library consortia like NgREN have strengthened cooperation among Nigerian universities. By introducing shared digital infrastructure, institutional repositories, resource sharing, and open science, they have significantly boosted the visibility of local research. Despite establishing these partnerships, universities still face obstacles to using open-access tools effectively. Key challenges include uneven library digital literacy, weak ICT infrastructure, and limited funding. As champions of the open-access movement and scholarly research, academic librarians play a pivotal role in knowledge dissemination. Consequently, investigating how digital literacy skills and collaborative library consortia shape their adoption of open-access infrastructure is highly necessary. This data will enhance open access adoption, strengthen scholarly communication, and boost the international visibility of Nigerian university research.

Statement of the Problem

Despite advanced OA infrastructure and a growing open science culture in Nigerian universities, academic librarians still underutilize OA tools. Studies show this stems from limited digital literacy, weak institutional backing, poor policy execution, and infrastructure gaps. Prior literature emphasizes repository awareness and development; however, empirical data detailing the role of digital competencies and library consortia in fostering OA tool utilization among academic librarians remains scarce. Consequently, this critical knowledge gap threatens to significantly impede the advancement of open science practices across Nigerian universities. This study examines how digital literacy skills and library consortia impact the adoption of open access tools by academic librarians in Nigerian universities.

Research Questions

The research questions that informed this research are:

1. What is the level of awareness and knowledge of open access tools among academic librarians in Southwestern Nigerian universities?
2. What are the skills and competencies that librarians currently possess in the utilisation of open access tools?
3. What are the institutional and professional challenges hindering librarians' readiness for open access tool implementation within library consortia?
4. What are the strategies that can be employed to enhance librarians' readiness and bridge the skills gap?

Theoretical Perspectives

The Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) is extensively utilized in the IS literature as a primary lens to understand user acceptance of innovative technologies. The model posits

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that whether a user adopts a new technology depends fundamentally on two factors: how useful they believe it is and how easy it is to use. According to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are critical drivers of technology adoption among information professionals. Librarians who recognize the value of open access (OA) tools in expanding access to scholarly literature, and who find these digital systems user-friendly, are significantly more likely to adopt and utilize them. This indicates that the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) can effectively measure the cognitive and attitudinal factors that drive librarians' readiness to embrace technological change in the digital era.

While TAM focuses primarily on individual acceptance, Rogers' (2003) Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory incorporates broader social and organizational variables. Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) framework states that five perceived attributes mediate how quickly a community adopts a new technology or behavior. Within library and information science contexts, these dimensions evaluate an innovation's perceived superiority over legacy systems, its alignment with professional values and workflows, its user accessibility, the potential for pilot testing, and the visibility of its operational outcomes. These factors heavily influence how academic libraries adopt Open Access (OA) tools. Grounded in the Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) theory, this process highlights the critical roles of institutional culture, peer pressure, training availability, and policy environments.

Combining TAM and DOI into an integrated framework will allow future studies to assess user attitudes and system factors. This comprehensive approach will measure multi-layered library readiness for successful open access (OA) tool integration. Existing literature features few readiness assessment models tailored for evaluating technology adoption in libraries. Within information science literature, Mutula and van Brakel's (2006) framework remains a foundational tool for assessing how prepared an organization is for digital integration. Researchers regularly apply this model to evaluate an institution's technological setup, data management strategies, and staff competencies. Similarly, Ali et al. (2025) combined the Technology Acceptance Model with standard IT frameworks to assess the digital readiness of Pakistani academic libraries. These models demonstrate that readiness depends on both individual capabilities and an institutional ecosystem that provides supportive leadership, dedicated funding, and alignment with organizational goals. Library consortia significantly drive the adoption of Open Access (OA) tools through collaborative resource sharing, strategic collective bargaining, and institutional capacity building.

According to Ukaegbu and Okwu (2023), the growth of open-access frameworks and digital materials relies heavily on cooperative alliances, with key drivers including CULNU and NgREN. Conversely, Fadeyi and Oyebamiji (2025) note that while library consortia have broadened access to digital collections, but these resources remain underutilised. This underuse stems primarily from a shortfall in the specific competencies required by librarians

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to implement Open Access (OA) tools. The mismatch between access and user readiness necessitates a systematic, ongoing training programs. To achieve system compatibility and operational readiness, Ukaegbu and Okwu (2023) advise consortia to proactively coordinate policy advocacy, software training, and interoperability standards among their members.

Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive qualitative research design to examine the perspectives of academic librarians in Nigeria on the role of digital literacy competencies and library consortia in facilitating the utilization of open access tools. This study utilized a sample of 10 universities in south-western Nigeria. The selection was deliberately balanced across ownership structures, comprising an equal distribution of five public and five state-owned universities. The study purposively sampled 50 professional librarians, selecting 10 from each university based on their involvement in digital library services, scholarly communication, institutional repositories, and open access initiatives. Participants for this study were selected from a pool of highly experienced professionals, including systems librarians, digital services librarians, acquisitions librarians, serials librarians, and senior reference or cataloging librarians. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, utilizing an interview guide designed by the researcher to align with the study's objectives

To ensure the credibility of the research, the interview guide was piloted with Library and Information Science experts for content validity. Additionally, participant transcripts were member-checked to confirm the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in-person and via virtual video platforms. Sessions lasted an average of 30 to 45 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent, subsequently transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Data analysis followed a thematic approach, which involved coding, categorizing, and extracting patterns relevant to the study's objectives. Prior to data collection, formal institutional ethical approval was secured, and written informed consent was provided by all subjects.

Table of Population

S/N	Name of University	University Type	Number of Librarians Selected
1	University of Ibadan	Federal	5
2	Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife	Federal	5
3	University of Lagos	Federal	5
4	Federal University of Technology, Akure	Federal	5
5	Federal University, Oye-Ekiti	Federal	5
6	Lagos State University, Ojo	State	5
7	Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti	State	5

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8	OlabisiOnabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye	State	5
9	Osun State University, Osogbo	State	5
10	AdekunleAjasin University, Akungba-Akoko	State	5
	Total		**50**

Findings and Analysis

This section presents the thematic analysis of qualitative interviews conducted with 50 academic librarians across ten universities in Southwestern Nigeria. Organized around the four primary research objectives, the evaluation merges participant quotes with frequency metrics and core themes. Tabular summaries complement the discussion to illustrate the participants' knowledge levels, practical skills, systemic barriers and readiness framework.

1. Awareness and Open Access Tool Knowledge Level

Academic librarians in Southwestern Nigeria exhibit a high theoretical awareness of Open Access (OA) platforms, yet they lack the practical skills required for effective implementation. Although librarians demonstrate high awareness of key open access repositories and management systems (DOAJ, DSpace, OJS), a critical gap remains between identifying these tools and applying them technically. The frequent admission of such minimal practical competency suggests a failing or inoperative institutional capacity for continuous professional development. The statement, "I know about OJS but I have never used it, not even for training purposes," is a typical situation where librarians get information about "the idea of OA tools" during seminars or conferences, but they are not offered proper or practical training to use OA tools. The data in Table 1 reveals a pronounced discrepancy between platform awareness and utilization. Although 86% of the cohort recognized DOAJ, merely 34% reported the ability to navigate it. Furthermore, respondents were largely unfamiliar with SHERPA/RoMEO, with over half stating complete ignorance of the database. These statistics indicate that open access tools are being embraced conceptually, yet they have not become deeply embedded in routine library operations. This knowledge gap hinders digital innovation and the integration of OA tools into institutional services. The results underscore the critical need for experiential and context-aware professional development across different academic librarian positions.

Table 1: Awareness of Key OA Tools (n = 50)

OA Tool	Aware (%)	Can Operate (%)	Not Aware (%)
DOAJ	86%	34%	14%
DSpace	72%	30%	28%
OJS	60%	20%	40%
SHERPA/RoMEO	48%	10%	52%

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2. Competencies and Skills in OA Tool Usage

Successful open access (OA) implementation requires combining conceptual frameworks with technical competencies, particularly in configuring metadata standards like Dublin Core, deploying repository software such as DSpace, and managing publishing workflows via Open Journal Systems (OJS). However, the study indicates a distinct skill gap, with only 20–38% of librarians reporting proficiency in crucial areas like open licensing and metadata standards. This challenge is exacerbated by a broader reluctance to engage with technology; many staff members outside of the systems department experience a general apprehension toward digital systems. This issue is further compounded by the lack of continuous professional development," noted one cataloguing librarian. *"They explained Creative Commons and metadata to us at first, but with no follow-up since then, most of the information has slipped my mind"* Without institutional reinforcement and ongoing practice, librarians will gradually lose the technical skills they learned during initial training. Moreover, as shown in Table 2, a gap analysis of library professionals' current skill sets versus those required for managing Open Access (OA) repositories and publishing reveals a critical proficiency deficit, with 66% to 80% of librarians lacking the necessary competencies. It is increasingly evident that university libraries are underfunding the development of the specialized digital competencies librarians need to fully leverage Open Access technologies.

Table 2: Gap Analysis – Competency Possession vs. Requirements

Competency Area	Required	Possessed (%)	Gap (%)
Metadata standards (e.g., Dublin Core)	Yes	38%	62%
OA licensing (e.g., CC licenses)	Yes	28%	72%
Repository management (DSpace/OJS)	Yes	34%	66%
Open journal setup (OJS)	Yes	20%	80%
Digital archiving & preservation	Yes	30%	70%

3. Institutional and Professional Challenges to Readiness

OA tool readiness fails without addressing both individual skills and deep-seated systemic barriers. The study identifies common institutional challenges across the universities, specifically missing policy guidelines, deficient infrastructure, weak consortia involvement, and disconnected leadership. The lack of an Open Access (OA) policy within the university library is notable, a gap that one librarian characterized as highly concerning. *"Our current library policy contains no provisions addressing open access"* exposing the strategic vulnerability of aligning library services with contemporary digital trends. Librarians also noted that state universities suffer from poor infrastructure, especially weak internet and unreliable power. These logistical hurdles severely impede the implementation and long-term viability of OA websites, which rely on constant uptime and continuous cloud server connectivity. The fact that 45 respondents cited resource constraints and 43 noted a lack of institutional backing highlights systemic gaps, proving that organizational readiness is

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inherently a multi-stakeholder responsibility. Regardless of their standalone effectiveness, OA tools cannot be successfully implemented without strategic support from institutions

Table 3: Identified Institutional Challenges (Frequency of Mention)

Challenge	Frequency (n = 50)
Lack of funding	45
Weak policy framework	39
Insufficient training	41
Poor infrastructure (internet, power)	37
Lack of institutional support	43
Inactive library consortia support	35

4. Plans to Enhance Preparedness and Bridge the Skills Gap

To resolve these complex challenges, participants proposed several actionable solutions. The leading recommendation was recurring training on Open Access (OA) platforms, which librarians specifically endorsed through consortium-led workshops. As highlighted by one participant *"It would be highly advantageous for the consortiums to organize Open Journal Systems (OJS) and DSpace training sessions biannually to ensure continuous capacity building for all members"* This suggests Nigeria's current consortia model underutilizes capacity building, necessitating a strategic shift from resource sharing to knowledge sharing. Additionally, the findings indicate substantial backing for policy-based initiatives. They suggested that university libraries need an OA strategy, a dedicated budget, and regular reviews. Embedding the OA planning process into the institution will foster awareness, accountability, and commitment. Global initiatives like Africa's LIBSENSE, the USA's SPARC, and Asia's COAR prove that success requires multilevel, collaborative action. These models indicate that successful OA integration depends on training, inter-organizational collaboration, and leadership engagement. As shown in Table 4, survey respondents highlighted strong support for these initiatives, with 90% favoring workshop continuity, 88% preferring leadership commitment, and 84% prioritizing institutional policy. Achieving preparedness requires a synchronized approach leveraging technical expertise, institutional will, and collaborative action. Without these measures, Nigerian academic libraries risk exclusion from the global Open Access ecosystem.

Table 4: Suggested Readiness Enhancement Strategies

Strategy	Support (%)
Regular OA focused training workshops	90%
Institutional OA policies and guidelines	84%
Technical support from consortia	76%
Mentorship and peer learning programs	62%
Leadership commitment and policy alignment	88%

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Discussion

The study revealed a troubling trend: although academic librarians at universities in Southwestern Nigeria have a fundamental awareness of Open Access (OA) platforms, their practical comprehension and utilization of these resources are limited. Although OA platforms such as DOAJ, DSpace, and OJS are widely recognized by librarians, few possess the technical skills needed to actually operate them (Idubor & Ogunbodede, 2024; Bankar, 2022). The majority of participants indicated that professional discussions and conferences served as their primary information sources, bypassing formal training. The minimal adoption of OA tools within library workflows restricts their capacity to disseminate knowledge. Onyebinama et al. (2024) supported this view, noting that while African university librarians were aware of open access platforms; limited training and technical capacity restricted their widespread adoption. Edet and Horsfall (2025) similarly noted that Nigerian librarians often misunderstand open access, frequently equating it solely with journal publishing rather than institutional repositories or broader knowledge accessibility.

The study also revealed that librarians lack the skills and expertise required to utilize OA tools effectively. The primary weaknesses identified were metadata development, digital repository management, and Creative Commons open licensing schemes. Analysis revealed that 66% to 80% of respondents lacked confidence in performing basic Open Access (OA) tasks, such as uploading to DSpace or managing an OJS workflow. The data indicated that professional development was lacking, as evidenced by participants reporting insufficient ongoing support and refresher training. This aligns with Masinde et al. (2021), who found that while library professionals in developing countries hold a positive attitude toward Open Access (OA), technical capacity remains limited due to inconsistent training opportunities, particularly in metadata and library management. Similarly, Olubiyo and Olubiyo (2023) concluded that librarians lack the necessary skills to manage open access (OA) initiatives unless they engage in continuous capacity building.

Research indicates that librarians' preparedness for open access (OA) resources is hindered by deep-seated institutional and systemic bottlenecks that extend far beyond individual skills. Most notably, a pervasive lack of formalized OA policies within academic libraries presents a major obstacle to progress. The result highlighted significant infrastructural barriers, including unreliable power, weak internet services, and insufficient financial resources. These institutional gaps highlight that evaluating the readiness of Open Access (OA) tools requires more than just assessing user skills; it must also include the broader institutional enablers that support them.

Consistently, Edet and Horsfall (2024) argue that deficient policies and neglected infrastructure within Nigerian universities impede digital integration efforts, consequently restricting the adoption of Open Access (OA). Furthermore, research by Akinola et al. (2022) indicates that inadequate institutional support and passive library leadership typically fail to recognize the true value of open-access projects within the Global South.

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Findings from the respondents indicate a critical need to enhance workforce readiness and address existing skill gaps through targeted strategic interventions. To drive Open Access integration, institutions needs to deploy operational tactics including ongoing hands-on training, collaborative consortia workshops, and well-funded institutional policies. Respondents also stressed the importance of institutional funding and strong leadership backing for the advancement of open access (OA). The literature identifies several best practices for successful open access (OA) implementation. For example, Kodua-Ntim (2023) recommends establishing national and institutional OA plans that prioritize three core elements: training, policymaking, and budgeting. To accelerate Open Access in developing environments, the 2021 UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science emphasized three core actions: collaborative capacity building, inclusive policymaking, and strategic infrastructure investment. These results validate the study's conclusions regarding promoting Open Access (OA) and librarian readiness.

Implications for Practice and Policy

1. **Strategic Capacity Building Measures**

The study's findings highlight the critical need for sustained, collaborative capacity-building initiatives to ensure librarians remain highly proficient in navigating Open Access (OA) platforms. Institutional and national library stakeholders must establish systematic, ongoing training frameworks for platforms such as DSpace, OJS, and DOAJ, explicitly aligning instruction with daily operational workflows. This strategy replaces ad hoc awareness workshops with a model of continuous professional development, embedding experiential training, formal mentorship, and peer-to-peer learning into institutional practice. The university library must make this training a mandatory component of staff development and performance appraisals, seamlessly integrating it into standard service delivery rather than treating it as optional.

2. **Guidelines for the creation of Consortia Level Training Programmes**

The findings emphasize the essential role of library consortia in addressing professional competencies and readiness disparities among academic librarians. Establishing a systematic framework for consortium-facilitated OA workshops on a three-to-six-month rotation optimizes resource sharing, standardizes curricula, and drives institutional engagement. Crucially, these initiatives must simulate authentic OA practices by integrating experiential pedagogy, interactive problem-solving and team-based projects. To drive continuous improvement, consortia should launch communities of practice that facilitate knowledge exchange and scale open access (OA) innovations across member institutions.

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3. **University Management and National Library Association Policy Implications**

Rather than treating Open Access as a technical issue, university management should approach it as a strategic tool to enhance global engagement, research visibility, and academic integrity. Institutional policies should explicitly incorporate OA mandates, execution strategies, and budget allocations for infrastructure, training, and content management. The Nigerian Library Association (NLA) and the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) are urged to establish national Open Access (OA) guidelines. Additionally, these bodies should advocate for OA policies at professional forums and incentivize institutions that successfully implement formal OA programs. To achieve full Open Access (OA) compliance, these institutions must work closely with the National Universities Commission (NUC).

4. Library Schools and Curriculum Review in LIS Education

For sustainable research development, it is essential that Nigeria embeds the technical and policy dimensions of Open Access into the foundational curriculum of Library and Information Science. Curriculum frameworks must be updated to incorporate applied training in repository management, open access licensing, digital preservation, and scholarly communication platforms. Integrating internships and industry collaborations into institutional repositories will expose students to practical open access environments prior to graduation. By equipping LIS graduates with relevant skills, library schools can help build a pipeline of OA ready professionals, ensuring the long-term sustainability of open access in Nigeria's academic libraries.

Conclusion

The study has revealed that academic librarians in southwestern Nigerian universities possess basic knowledge of open-access tools like DSpace, DOAJ, and OJS, yet require advanced technical training for optimal deployment. Open Access (OA) adoption faces several critical barriers. Key obstacles include poor metadata production, inadequate repository management, and a lack of open licensing. Furthermore, progress is hindered by weak institutional policies, deficient infrastructure, limited funding, and minimal management support. Therefore, this study concludes that successful Open Access implementation requires comprehensive strategic planning. To achieve this, it is essential to embed OA competencies within the LIS curriculum, promote consortia-based training, and establish robust institutional policies. Future studies should conduct long-term evaluations of capacity-building initiatives and perform regional comparisons of OA readiness. This will yield more robust, generalized evidence to guide future policy and practice in Nigeria.

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Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are given:

1. Organize continuous professional development to equip librarians with expertise in institutional repositories, metadata creation, open-source publishing, and open licensing.
2. To enhance how library consortia (like NgREN and CULNU) deliver collaborative training, technical support, and shared Open Access tools.
3. Establish institutional open access policies while securing the funding, ICT infrastructure, and technical support needed to sustain open access tools in university libraries.
4. LIS programs must integrate open science, digital repositories, and open access technologies into their curricula to prepare future librarians for supporting digital scholarship.

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