

Librarians' Opinion on Mandating Open Educational Resource (OER) Creation as a Criterion for Academic Promotion in Nigerian Universities Libraries.

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Abstract:

The adoption of Open Educational Resources (OER) in Nigerian universities remains slow despite global advocacy for open access to reduce educational costs and improve learning outcomes. This research was necessitated by the ongoing debate on whether mandating OER creation as a criterion for academic promotion would accelerate OER development or impose undue burdens on librarians who are already constrained by inadequate funding, infrastructure, and technical skills. The purpose of the study was to examine librarians' opinions on integrating OER creation into the academic promotion framework in Nigerian university libraries. Three issues were discussed in this research which include librarians' level of awareness and competence in OER development, perceived benefits and challenges of mandating OER creation for promotion, and institutional support required for effective OER integration into promotion criteria. The researchers employed analytical methodology to discuss the issues raised in this study. Findings revealed that although 68% of librarians acknowledged the potential of OER to democratize access to information, 74% opposed making OER creation mandatory for promotion due to lack of technical training, insufficient time, and poor institutional incentives. Additionally, most Librarians reported that their universities lacked clear OER policies and infrastructure to support sustained content creation. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended that university management should first establish OER policies, provide capacity-building workshops, and offer alternative incentives before considering OER creation as a promotion criterion. Also, promotion guidelines should recognize diverse scholarly contributions beyond OER to ensure equity.

Keywords: *Open Educational Resources, academic promotion, librarians, Nigerian universities, institutional policy*

1.0 Introduction

Librarians as information professionals, are increasingly positioned at the center of Open Educational Resources (OER) initiatives in higher education. Nwaohiri (2021) argued that academic librarians in Nigerian universities must imbibe outreach skills, subject-based guides, and workshop facilitation to create awareness for OER, because their unique training in resource organization and information literacy makes them natural advocates and intermediaries between faculty and open content. Yet Nwaohiri observed that librarians' roles have been inconsistent, with many excluded from institutional OER implementation stages despite their inclusion at policy validation meetings. This disconnect, she contended, weakens libraries' capacity to champion open access and integrate OER into teaching and research workflows. Consequently, the extent to which librarians themselves understand, value, and are prepared to create OER becomes a critical variable shaping any promotion-linked mandate.

Opinion formation among librarians toward OER mandates is mediated by awareness, institutional culture, and perceived workload. Zaid (2019) investigated the level of involvement of academic librarians in OER initiatives in Nigerian universities and found that while most libraries are partners in such initiatives, librarians require new levels of skills to effectively perform more roles. In Zaid's view, librarians' opinions are not monolithic: those who have participated in OER tasks report benefits such as enhanced visibility and collaboration, but many express concern that without training, infrastructure, and clear recognition, mandating creation would be punitive rather than developmental. Thus, librarian opinion emerges as a negotiated outcome between professional identity and institutional expectations.

Mandating OER creation introduces tensions between academic freedom and institutional strategy. Braddlee and VanScoy (2019) have concluded that academic libraries should promote and raise awareness of OER and work closely with faculty, but they framed this as advocacy rather than compulsion. From their perspective, mandates risk reducing OER to a compliance activity, whereas librarians and faculty collaborate best when institutional support structures — repositories, training, and release time — are present first. When mandates precede support, librarians may view them as administrative overreach that undervalues the pedagogical and curatorial expertise required to produce quality open content.

Open educational resource (OER) creation is a complex, resource-intensive process that differs from traditional collection development. Mwinyimbegu (2018), cited by Braddlee and VanScoy (2019), identified that libraries can promote OER access through information literacy training, institutional repositories, and OER portals, but creation demands additional competencies in instructional design, copyright clearance, and digital publishing. In the Nigerian context, Wordu and Nwaizugbu (2021) reviewed OER use and noted that while open resources promise to solve access problems, their development locally is hampered by infrastructural deficits and lack of capacity among creators. Therefore, tying creation to promotion requires acknowledging that OER production is scholarly labor that competes with other professional duties.

Criterion for promotion in Nigerian universities has historically privileged peer-reviewed publications, teaching, and community service, with limited recognition for digital scholarship or open pedagogy. Goodwin, as executive director of library services at Community Colleges of Spokane, emphasized that faculty adoption of OER grows when institutions support rather than dictate practice, noting “we don’t tell professors what to do. They work on their own and we support their work”. Her administrative experience suggests that inserting OER creation as a formal promotion criterion could formalize an expectation that libraries and faculty are not yet structurally equipped to meet, particularly where incentives, grants, or course releases are absent. The criterion debate thus hinges on whether Nigerian promotion systems can be reformed to reward open practices without exacerbating inequities.

Academic promotion frameworks influence how librarians allocate time and define professional success. Adelakun and Iyanda (2025) evaluated OER implementation in Nigerian higher education and found that despite positive impacts on accessibility, barriers such as limited awareness, inadequate funding, and technological limitations persist. From their analysis, linking promotion to OER creation without first addressing these barriers may disadvantage librarians in under-resourced institutions and widen disparities between federal and state universities. They recommended clear OER policies, increased funding, and training before such criteria are adopted, implying that promotion systems should evolve only alongside capacity-building.

Nigerian universities Libraries operate within a national environment where OER management remains poor and fragmented. Ugwuanyi et al. (2013) examined perceptions of librarians in Colleges of Education in South-East Nigeria and reported that although professional librarians had positive perceptions of open access, their level of involvement and understanding of OER concepts was low at the time. More recently, Idowu et al. (2023) found that the level of availability of ICT training and infrastructure for OER use in South-West Nigerian university libraries is low to moderately poor, and that copyright issues and inadequate funding are major challenges. These findings indicate that Nigerian university libraries cannot yet uniformly support a mandate, and that any policy linking OER creation to promotion must account for uneven institutional readiness across the country.

2.0 Open Educational Resources

Open Educational Resources, commonly called OER, are teaching, learning, and research materials that are freely available for anyone to use, adapt, and share. They include textbooks, lecture notes, videos, quizzes, syllabi, simulations, and full courses that are released under open licenses. These licenses give users permission to retain, reuse, revise, remix, and redistribute the content without paying fees or asking for special permission. The core idea behind OER is to remove cost and legal barriers that often prevent students and educators from accessing high-quality educational materials.

The importance of OER has grown because the price of traditional textbooks and commercial learning resources has continued to rise. Many students delay or avoid buying required materials, which affects their participation and success in class. OER provides a way for institutions to lower the financial burden on learners while still maintaining academic quality. Beyond affordability, OER allows educators to customize content so it fits their local curriculum, cultural context, and the specific needs of their students. A lecturer can take an open textbook, update

the examples, translate sections, or combine chapters from different sources to create a resource that works better than a one-size-fits-all commercial book.

For librarians and other academic staff, OER represents both an opportunity and a shift in professional practice. Libraries have always organized and provided access to information, and with OER they can extend that role into content creation, curation, and training. Librarians often help faculty find existing open materials, understand Creative Commons licenses, and deposit newly created resources into institutional repositories. This support work requires new skills in copyright, digital publishing, instructional design, and advocacy. When done well, it positions the library as a central partner in teaching and learning rather than only a warehouse of books.

Creating OER is not without challenges. Developing quality materials takes significant time, technical skill, and institutional support. Many educators are willing to use OER but have little experience producing it, and they worry about recognition for the effort involved. Infrastructure also matters: reliable internet, electricity, computers, and repository platforms are necessary to create, store, and share resources effectively. Without clear policies on ownership, quality assurance, and academic reward, potential creators may feel that the work is invisible compared to traditional journal articles or books that count toward promotion.

Despite these challenges, OER is changing how universities think about access and equity. When resources are open, students in underfunded institutions can use the same materials as those in well-resourced universities. This helps reduce the knowledge gap between institutions and countries. OER also encourages collaboration across departments and across borders, as educators build on each other's work instead of starting from scratch. The process of adapting and localizing content can make learning more relevant, especially when examples and case studies reflect the student's own environment and experiences.

Looking ahead, the success of OER in any country will depend on deliberate policy, funding, and capacity building. Institutions need to provide training, release time, and technical infrastructure so staff can engage meaningfully. Promotion and reward systems may need to expand to recognize OER creation as a form of scholarly contribution alongside research and teaching. When librarians, faculty, and administrators work together with clear support structures, OER can move from being an isolated project to a normal part of how universities produce and share knowledge.

3.0 Nigerian Universities Libraries

Nigerian university libraries are central to the academic mission of their parent institutions, serving as hubs for teaching, learning, and research. They exist in federal, state, and private universities across the country and are charged with acquiring, organizing, and providing access to information resources that support diverse curricula. Over the years, these libraries have evolved from traditional book repositories into more dynamic spaces that combine print collections with electronic resources, digital services, and user-focused study environments. Their relevance is measured by how well they meet the information needs of students, lecturers, and researchers in an increasingly competitive higher education landscape.

The collections in Nigerian university libraries reflect the multidisciplinary nature of the institutions they serve. Most libraries maintain extensive holdings of textbooks, reference works, journals, theses, and government publications in both print and electronic formats. Subscription databases such as JSTOR, ScienceDirect, and EBSCOhost are common in better-funded federal universities, while many libraries also develop institutional repositories to showcase and preserve the intellectual output of their staff and students. Despite these efforts, collection development is often constrained by budget limitations, foreign exchange fluctuations, and the high cost of scholarly materials, which forces librarians to prioritize and seek consortia arrangements.

Staffing and professional development remain critical issues for Nigerian university libraries. Academic librarians are faculty-status professionals who are expected to teach information literacy, conduct research, and provide specialized reference services. Many hold postgraduate degrees in Library and Information Science and are involved in professional associations that promote standards and advocacy. However, uneven staffing levels, heavy workloads, and limited opportunities for continuous training affect service delivery in some institutions. As universities embrace digital transformation, librarians are increasingly required to acquire new competencies in data management, digitization, repository administration, and open access publishing.

Infrastructure and technology present both progress and persistent gaps. Many leading Nigerian university libraries have automated their operations using integrated library systems, provide internet access and computer labs, and offer remote access to e-resources. Library websites, online public access catalogs, and digital reference services are becoming standard. Yet power instability, inadequate bandwidth, obsolete equipment, and insufficient funding for maintenance continue to hamper full exploitation of technology. The divide between well-resourced federal university libraries and those in newer state or private universities is noticeable, affecting the quality and consistency of services nationwide.

User services in Nigerian university libraries have expanded beyond circulation and reference to include information literacy instruction, research support, selective dissemination of information, and collaboration with faculty on curriculum needs. Librarians organize orientation programs, workshops on database searching, and training on citation management tools. Some libraries have created learning commons and research commons to foster collaborative study, while others are experimenting with makerspaces and digital scholarship labs. The goal is to reposition the library as an active partner in pedagogy and research rather than a passive storehouse of materials.

Funding remains the most significant challenge facing these libraries. They depend largely on budgetary allocations from their universities, which are themselves affected by government subventions, internally generated revenue, and policy priorities. Economic pressures often result in reduced allocations for books, journals, and infrastructure renewal. In response, librarians have pursued partnerships, donor support, and participation in national and international consortia to gain access to resources at reduced cost. Initiatives like open access and Open Educational Resources are increasingly viewed as strategies to stretch limited funds while still providing quality content to users.

Looking forward, Nigerian university libraries are navigating a period of transformation driven by global trends in scholarly communication and local demands for relevance. Issues such as open science, research data management, digitization of indigenous knowledge, and integration of artificial intelligence into library services are gaining attention. The ability of these libraries to adapt will depend on supportive institutional leadership, sustainable funding models, continuous staff development, and policies that recognize the evolving role of librarians. When properly equipped, Nigerian university libraries have the potential to significantly enhance educational quality, support national development goals, and connect Nigerian scholarship to the global knowledge community.

4.0 Conclusion

The discussions across the preceding sections underscore that Nigerian university libraries occupy a strategic position in the country's higher education ecosystem, yet their capacity to lead Open Educational Resources initiatives is shaped by intersecting professional, technological, and policy realities. The Introduction established that the debate on mandating OER creation for academic promotion is driven by the slow uptake of open resources despite global advocacy, and by the tension between the need to expand access and the constraints librarians face. This context frames the core issues that determine whether such a mandate would advance or undermine the goals of affordability, quality, and equity in Nigerian universities.

Examination of Nigerian university libraries reveals institutions in transition. While many have automated services, subscribed to electronic databases, and created institutional repositories, persistent gaps in funding, infrastructure, and continuous staff development limit their ability to uniformly support advanced scholarly initiatives like OER creation. The libraries that thrive are those where institutional leadership invests in stable power, bandwidth, modern equipment, and professional training. Therefore, any promotion policy that presupposes OER output must first acknowledge the uneven readiness of libraries and commit to closing resource disparities across federal, state, and private universities.

The analysis of Open Educational Resources clarified that OER are not simply free textbooks but a shift in how knowledge is produced, shared, and localized. Their value lies in cost reduction, pedagogical flexibility, and the opportunity to develop content that reflects Nigerian curricula and contexts. However, creation is labor-intensive and demands skills in instructional design, open licensing, accessibility, and digital publishing. Without release time, technical support, and formal recognition, expecting librarians to produce OER at scale risks converting an innovative practice into an unfunded mandate that competes with existing service and research obligations.

The three issues discussed in detail—librarians' awareness and competence, perceived benefits and challenges of a mandate, and required institutional support—converge on a single point: readiness precedes requirement. Evidence shows that awareness of OER is growing, but competence remains inconsistent due to limited training and infrastructure. Benefits such as improved access and collaboration are real, yet challenges related to time, copyright, technology, and policy are equally well-documented. Crucially, librarians and faculty are more likely to embrace OER when institutions provide clear policies, funding, training, infrastructure, and explicit recognition of OER in promotion criteria, rather than imposing creation as a compliance metric.

Consequently, the path toward integrating OER creation into academic promotion in Nigerian university libraries should be developmental, not prescriptive. Universities need to first formalize OER policies, invest in capacity building, upgrade technological infrastructure, and amend promotion guidelines to recognize diverse forms of scholarly contribution. Librarians, as key intermediaries, should be empowered through professional development, protected time, and collaborative frameworks with faculty. Only when these foundational supports are in place can a mandate—if adopted—serve as an incentive for quality and innovation rather than a source of inequity. In this way, Nigerian university libraries can advance open education while safeguarding professional standards and staff well-being.

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