

ABSTRACT

Institutional repositories (IRs) present universities with an opportunity to provide global open access (OA) to their scholarship, yet by the time of this study, that avenue was underutilised in East Africa (EA). Under the OA movement, research is made freely available for the end user with hardly any restrictions on access. By 2013 when this study started, the majority of IRs in EA provided very little of their content as OA, which inspired the author to do this study. The key question this study sought to answer, therefore, was how could access to scholarly information in institutional repositories in East Africa be increased? The investigation focused on both the repository managers and the researchers. The study applied the stakeholder theory and the diffusion of innovations theory in aligning how the various repository stakeholders were integrated into the development and management of IRs.

The study purposively selected universities in EA, by identifying repositories that had the highest number of records by July 2014. These were Kenyatta University (KU) in Kenya, Makerere University (Mak) in Uganda and Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS) in Tanzania. A mixed methods approach was used to collect data, following a concurrent strategy, with data collected in one phase, during which both quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously. Data was collected using self-administered questionnaires, face-to-face interviews and document analysis. Six librarians in charge of the IRs were purposively selected and interviewed, whereas 183 researchers, selected using systematic random sampling, responded to the questionnaire.

The study revealed that the development of IRs in each of the three universities was unique, and was influenced by the time when each started, with Mak in 2006, KU in 2012 and the latest being MUHAS in 2013 when the BOAI was more clear about how IRs should operate. MUHAS, therefore, followed some of the established guidelines of setting up an IR, and it turned out to be more OA than the other two universities. The three universities had IR policies developed at different stages; MUHAS at the beginning, while those for KU and Mak established after setting up the IRs. There was mediated self-archiving in each of the three universities. Marketing of the IR in the three universities was limited to training during user education and/or information literacy sessions, and e-mail messages on staff mailing lists. Although the library websites of the three universities were used to provide a link to the IR, there was no dedicated page to market OA and IR activities. Initially, content collection was on voluntary basis, with the researchers

contacted a number of times before publications were obtained for uploading in the IR. All these factors impacted on what got to be provided as OA in the IRs. On the researchers' side, the study revealed that 43% of the respondents at Mak and 44% of the respondents at KU had published in OA journals, implying that a high percentage of their publications could not be provided as OA in the IR. MUHAS, on the other hand, had 70% of the respondents who had published in OA journals. The majority (81.4%) of the respondents in the three universities were strongly in favour of OA. However, there were a number of factors limiting participation in the IR activities, the most prominent being the researchers' unawareness about the benefits of OA and self-archiving in the IR. Remedies were recommended to increase the content deposited and improve access to the scholarly information of IRs in EA. This study adds to the depth of knowledge on IRs by providing useful pointers to the factors that affect OA to scholarly information in IRs of universities in EA. Some of these pointers include: lack of government and funder support for OA, content collection workflows with limited author permission to self-archive and few librarians vigilantly following up the collection of post-prints for self-archiving.