A Study of the Degree of Openness of University Digital Repositories in Sudan

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Author’s contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

ABSTRACT

The goal of university institutional repositories worldwide is to provide open access to their collections of different types of information resources and scholarly writings for all, freely and instantly. However, different resources are subject to a number of restrictions that make it difficult for these repositories to make their resources accessible for all users. Intellectual property and copyright laws play an important role in this regard. This study explores the four largest university repositories in Sudan, with a view to investigating their access policies and practices, and the degree of openness in each of the four repositories. The study adopted a descriptive analytical approach employing the case study method. Data was collected by semi-structured interviews with repository managers, in addition to data from the Directory of Open Access Repositories (OpenDOAR), and from the websites of the studied repositories. The study revealed that all investigated repositories do not deal directly with publishers to clear copyright issues, and recommended that repositories encourage faculty members and researchers to share their research work with open access licenses such as the Creative Commons licenses.

Keywords: Access policies; copyright laws; institutional repositories; open access; publisher permissions; Sudanese university repositories.

1. INTRODUCTION

Open access to scientific information has been a controversial issue for the last two decades or so. However, this new mode of scholarly publishing has gained ground now and has been accepted by scholars and institutions worldwide. There are two major routes of open access publishing namely gold open access and green open access. The former route deals with publishing via open access journals whereas the latter one refers to publishing via institutional repositories or via personal websites of authors and scholars. This study deals with university institutional repositories in Sudan with a focus on the open access policies and practices of these repositories.

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The basic objective of open access repositories is to collect scholarly papers and research and make them available to all via the internet. To succeed in collecting high quality scholarly output, repositories should have proper deposit and access policies [1]. One of the widely practiced policies is mandatory self-archiving policy which was discussed by Harnad as cited by Ezema [2], stressing that many scholars would ignore those mandates and would refrain from depositing their publications in repositories for a number of reasons including copyrights implications of self-archiving their publications.

The concept of “copyright” refers to “the exclusive rights to publish, distribute, and use a work. It applies to works such as text, art, or music; but not to the ideas behind those expressions” [3]. There are different details of copyright laws around the world, but the basic rights are more or less similar in most countries due to international treaties and agreements in this regard, principally the Berne Convention which provides a common framework to be followed by national legislations in order to ensure that countries respect the rights of foreign authors and contributors [4]. Morrison and Secker [5] pointed out that users can get permissions in the form of licenses from copyright holders so as to copy and communicate copyright works. They further highlighted that users can use copyright works without the permission of the copyright holder by taking advantage of copyright exceptions that allow them to do so, and that libraries around the world have specific exceptions in copyright laws that allow libraries to copy under certain circumstances without the need to get permission.

Copyright law in Sudan is not different from the international practices in this regard as it stipulates the following [6]:

I. Attribution of the intellectual product to the author.
II. The copyrighted material should not be amended in any way.
III. Rights cannot become obsolete and cannot be relinquished.
IV. The author has financial rights (royalties) in the following cases:
   a) Copying of his/her product
   b) Translation or adaptation of the product
   c) Commercial distribution of the product to the public.

There are also some exceptions for use for educational and research purposes.

1.1 Copyright and Open Access Policies and Mandates

Academic publishers normally ask authors to transfer their copyright to them in order to publish their works. However, a publisher can publish an author's work without a transfer of all of that author's rights under copyright, and many authors do not understand they are the copyright owner of their work [7]. Zhang and Watson [8] discussed the “green open access” model and explained that authors first publish their works in pay-wall journals and later they “self-archive” their works by depositing them in institutional repositories (IRs) or subject-specific repositories after the elapsing of a publisher-specified embargo period. They pointed out that green open access is allowed by most publishers’ policies. On the other hand, Macklin [9] pointed out that the authors and the repository managers are concerned whether their publishers provide permissions for self-archiving in an institutional repository. Palmer et al [10] highlighted a number of techniques employed to address intellectual property (IP) and copyright issues by IRs, including the hiring of specialized IP personnel, development of processes for systematic rights clearance, and direct communication with publishers on IP and copyright issues. Hanlon and Ramirez [11] explored institutional repository copyright clearance trends. They found out that library personnel, instead of authors, engaged in copyright clearance activities for IRs. They recommended that librarians may consider developing IR copyright clearance “best practices” in order to supplement and augment existing copyright directories such as Sherpa/Romeo. Hansen [12], on the other hand, examined the scope of author-retained rights in journal articles that were written by academic authors at universities with institutional repositories and with open access policies. Hansen concluded that many institutions can increase the percentage of accessible works by taking advantage of the existing retained author rights. Koulouris and Kapidakis [13] studied the access and reproduction policies of the digital collections of ten leading university digital libraries and found that access was provided free subject to attribution to the source or otherwise mostly under fair use provisions, while commercial reproduction needs written permission and it was not free of charge. Dryden [14] investigated how users of archived material
dealt with the restrictions such as copyright that archives placed on reuse of their holdings. He concluded that although his study participants were aware of copyright issues, their knowledge was incomplete and sometimes confused, and that they were often annoyed by the controls repositories place on reuse and would ignore them. Priest [15] reported that the Harvard University Faculty of Arts and Sciences adopted a mandatory deposit policy that granted the university nonexclusive copyright licenses to archive and publicly distribute all faculty-produced scholarly articles.

Dawson & Yang [16] reviewed copyright policies on the websites of one hundred institutional repositories or archives. They stressed that repositories have used one or a combination of the following approaches to achieve open access:

I. There is no copyright issue if the repository has government content,
II. Copyright clearance and getting permissions from publishers is the authors’ responsibility,
III. A few libraries take the full responsibility from copyright clearance to loading the resources onto the repository.
IV. Institutions develop addendums to the publishers’ agreement and offer waiver or opt-out options, making faculty future publications open access under such agreement while copyright is still an issue for older publications,
V. Institutions adopted open access policy whereby each faculty member agrees to offer the repository a nonexclusive, irrevocable, paid-up, worldwide license or permission to make their publications open access.
VI. Repositories upload final versions before publication and enforce embargoes when publishers require such a delay.

The above literature review highlights the fact that copyright is a thorny issue and there is no one standard way to achieve open access to scholarly output in institutional repositories.

2. STUDY OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This study aims to investigate the open access policies and practices of four university repositories in Sudan with a focus on electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs), journal articles, and books. The study adopts the descriptive analytical approach employing the case study method. Data was collected by semistructured interviews, document analysis and observation.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

There are ten university repositories in Sudan listed by the Directory of Open Access Repositories (OpenDOAR). The four oldest and largest ones are selected for this study. These are:

- University of Khartoum Digital Repository,
- International University of Africa Repository,
- Al-Neelain University Repository,
- Sudan University for Science and Technology (SUST) Repository.

The study focuses on access policies and practices followed by these four repositories in making available the full text content of different types of information sources, with a focus on access to electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs), journal articles, and books. Table 1 shows the types and numbers of materials available in the studied repositories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source University</th>
<th>Journal Articles</th>
<th>Books</th>
<th>ETDs</th>
<th>Conference Papers</th>
<th>Video &amp;Audio Files</th>
<th>Archives</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Khartoum</td>
<td>4985</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>10329</td>
<td>771</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2467</td>
<td>4576</td>
<td>23610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int. Univ. of Africa</td>
<td>1688</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>1852</td>
<td>888</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>4662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Neelain University</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9343</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>726</td>
<td>12485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUST</td>
<td>2504</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15840</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>9654</td>
<td>28216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.1 Existence of Policy Statements on OpenDOAR and Repository Websites

The Directory of Open Access Repositories (OpenDOAR) was examined to determine whether these repositories are having any stated policies as well as the types of policies. There are five policies outlined in OpenDOAR: metadata, data, content, submission, and preservation. The repositories’ websites were also examined for the existence of copyright and reuse permission statements. Table 2. depicts the findings of these examinations.

3.2 Full-text Access Policies for ETDs, Journal Articles, and Books

3.2.1 University of Khartoum (UofK) repository

Most of the repository’s collections are open for all to access in full text without restrictions except for theses and dissertations (ETDs) and journal articles. All theses and dissertations produced before the year 1962 up to the year 2002 are freely accessible in full text without any restrictions or permissions. All theses and dissertation produced after the year 2002 undergo an embargo period of five years after which the full text of the thesis or dissertation will be accessible. Within this embargo period, only the metadata and abstract are available. Some of the ETDs that have passed the embargo period may be restricted to metadata and abstract access only while the full text is password protected and users may access it after getting authorization from the repository administration. Journal Articles from journals not published by the university are provided in full text after consulting the Sherpa/Romeo publishers’ database. Most of the books are nonacademic digitized books from the Sudan Library collection and they are provided for all as full text.

3.2.2 International University of Africa repository

Students sign a mandatory ETD release form transferring copyright to the University when submitting their ETD. Older ETDs that are not permitted by their copyright holders are accessed only as abstracts and metadata. Most journal articles included in the repository are from journals published by the university and are provided in full text. Journal articles published in other journals are also accessed in full text after the repository gets permission from the author. Books published by the university are provided in full text, otherwise only the metadata and preliminary pages are provided.

3.2.3 Al-Neelain University Repository

ETDs are provided in full text after students sign a mandatory release form transferring copyright to the University when submitting their ETD. ETDs produced before 2016 are accessible as metadata and abstracts only and may be accessed in full text only after permission from the author. All Journal articles whether published by the university journals or otherwise are provided in full text without permissions from the authors or publishers. Books are provided as full text without permissions or restrictions.

3.2.4 Sudan University of Science and Technology (SUST) repository

ETDs are made accessible in full text after students sign a mandatory release form at the time of submission. ETDs produced before 2014 are allowed to be accessed in full text only with permission from their authors. Journal articles whether from those published by the university or other publishers are accessed in full text without permission from the authors or publishers. Books and book chapters are provided in full text only with permission from the authors, otherwise only the preliminary pages and the metadata are provided.

Table 2. Existence of policy statements on OpenDOAR and repository website

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>University of Khartoum</th>
<th>Int. Univ. of Africa</th>
<th>Al-Neelain University</th>
<th>SUST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metadata</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>incomplete</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>incomplete</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>incomplete</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>incomplete</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preservation</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>incomplete</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copyright statement on website</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. CONCLUSIONS

All studied repositories make available the full text of their collections of video and audio files, conference papers, course material, and university administrative publications and archives. They may agree or differ in their treatment of other copyrighted collections such as ETDs, journal articles, and books.

Three of the studied repositories require their students to sign a mandatory ETD release form when submitting their ETDs, relinquishing the copyright to the university. Whereas one university, the University of Khartoum, does not require a mandatory release form signing but impose a five year embargo period before the full text of the ETDs can be accessed by the repository users. The same former three universities do not provide full access to ETDs produced before the establishment of their repositories and the introduction of the release form unless they get permission from the authors, whereas the fourth university (U of K) makes all ETDs produced before the year 2002 available in full text without restrictions or permissions from the authors.

All four repositories provide the full text of articles in journals published by these universities. They differ in their access policy on journal articles published by other publishers; one university asks permission from the authors, two universities publish these articles without permissions from the authors or publishers, whereas one university consults the Sherpa/Romeo publisher’s database for restrictions and permissions.

All four repositories have different policies regarding their books collections. One repository includes only digitized nonacademic books from the Sudan Library collection and makes them accessible in full text. In another repository only books published by the university are provided in full text, otherwise only the metadata and preliminary pages are provided. In a third repository books or book chapters are provided in full text with permission from the authors, otherwise only the preliminary pages and the metadata are provided. The fourth repository provides the full text of all books without permissions or restrictions.

Results of this study support the viewpoint that university repositories make it the responsibility of authors to clear copyright issues with publishers while providing little or no assistance to the authors.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The author recommends the following for achieving risk free open access practices:

- Introduction of a written open access policy including a mandatory permission to the university as to make available the Faculty’s scholarly articles and research on the repository.
- Introduction of copyright statements on the repositories websites rather than only on the OpenDOAR.
- Copyright literacy campaigns and advocacy should be carried out by repository and university administrations.
- Encouragement of authors and scholars to license their scholarly product under open access licenses such as the Creative Commons rather than transferring of copyright to the publishers.
- University repositories in Sudan should collaborate in order to have a unified set of policies regarding copyright, reuse and permissions. This will benefit scholars and researchers and raise their awareness of copyright and licensing issues.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, respondents’ written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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