

Open Access and Institutional Repositories: Integrating Free Scholarly Resources into Collection Development at UAC



By **Joseph Sagbohan** (University of Abomey-Calavi – UAC)

<joseph.sagbohan@gmail.com> ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5669-2534>

Abstract

At the University of Abomey-Calavi (UAC), sustained financial constraints have increasingly challenged the library's ability to maintain comprehensive and up-to-date academic collections.

As reliance on traditional print materials and subscription-based electronic resources becomes less viable, open access (OA) resources and institutional repositories (IRs) have emerged as practical and strategically important alternatives for supporting teaching, learning, and research. Despite their growing global relevance, these free scholarly resources are not yet systematically integrated into UAC's collection development practices, resulting in missed opportunities for access, visibility, and institutional impact.

This article reflects on how OA resources and institutional repositories can be more deliberately incorporated into collection development at UAC. Drawing on an examination of existing library practices, stakeholder perspectives, and comparable experiences from other academic institutions, it considers the current level of awareness, use, and perceived value of OA and IRs within the university community. Rather than advancing a purely technical solution, the discussion emphasizes how librarians, faculty, and administrators understand — and sometimes hesitate to engage with — open scholarly resources.

The findings suggest that while UAC generates a substantial body of scholarly output, much of it remains difficult to discover or reuse, and OA resources are often consulted informally rather than curated intentionally. This situation points to the need for clearer policies, shared evaluation criteria, and greater professional support for librarians tasked with selecting and promoting open content. Integrating OA and IRs into collection development is therefore less a question of replacing paid resources than of redefining the library's role from acquisition focused to access-oriented and collaborative.

By situating OA and institutional repositories within everyday collection development decisions, UAC can move toward a more sustainable, inclusive, and visible scholarly ecosystem. Such an approach not only alleviates budgetary pressure but also strengthens the university's contribution to open science and reinforces the library's relevance in a rapidly evolving information landscape.

Key Words: Open Access (OA), Institutional Repositories, Collection Development, Sustainable Collection Management, Research Accessibility, and UAC.

Introduction

The rapid growth of Open Access (OA) publishing and institutional repositories (IRs) has profoundly transformed scholarly communication and collection development practices

worldwide. Academic libraries, particularly in resource-constrained contexts, are increasingly challenged to provide broad, equitable access to scholarly information while facing rising subscription costs and budgetary limitations. Within this environment, OA and IRs offer strategic opportunities to expand collections, enhance institutional visibility, and support teaching, learning, and research without a proportional financial burden.

At the University of Abomey-Calavi (UAC), the largest public university in Benin, the need to strengthen access to scholarly resources is especially critical. Integrating free scholarly resources — through Open Access initiatives and a robust institutional repository — into collection development policies aligns with global best practices and supports national and regional research priorities. This article adopts a practitioner-oriented, evidence-based, and reflective approach, emphasizing practical implications for collection development, licensing alternatives, sustainability, and user-centered access.

Literature Review

Open Access is commonly defined as the free, immediate, online availability of research outputs, coupled with the rights to use these materials fully in the digital environment (Budapest Open Access Initiative, 2002). The literature identifies two principal OA pathways: the gold route (OA journals) and the green route (self-archiving in repositories). Institutional repositories serve as key infrastructures for the green OA model, enabling universities to collect, preserve, and disseminate the intellectual output of their communities (Crow, 2002).

Studies consistently highlight the role of OA and IRs in increasing research visibility, citation impact, and institutional prestige (Swan, 2010; Pinfield, 2015). For libraries, OA resources are no longer peripheral supplements but integral components of collection development strategies (Horava, 2010). The professional literature emphasizes that collection development librarians must move beyond acquisition-centric models toward curation, integration, and assessment of diverse content streams, including free and openly licensed materials.

In African and Global South contexts, OA has been widely recognized as a tool for reducing knowledge inequities (Chan et al., 2011). However, the literature also notes persistent challenges: lack of clear policies, insufficient technical infrastructure, limited staff capacity, and concerns about quality control and the sustainability of OA resources (Dulle & Minishi-Majanja, 2011). These findings underscore the importance of institutional frameworks that deliberately integrate OA and IRs into formal collection development policies rather than treating them as ad hoc solutions.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative-descriptive methodology with complementary quantitative elements, consistent with *Against the Grain's* emphasis on practice-informed research. Data collection combined:

1. Document analysis of UAC library policies, strategic plans, and existing digital collections;
2. Surveys administered to faculty members, researchers, and librarians to assess awareness, usage, and perceptions of OA and IRs;
3. Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including library administrators and ICT staff, to identify operational challenges and strategic priorities.

Data were analyzed thematically, focusing on alignment between OA/IR practices and collection development objectives, resource integration workflows, and perceived value for users.

Results

The findings indicate that the University of Abomey-Calavi (UAC) already generates a substantial body of scholarly output, including theses, dissertations, journal articles, conference papers, and institutional reports. However, we observed that a large proportion of this content remains underutilized or effectively invisible beyond the institution. Limited dissemination channels and the absence of systematic self-archiving practices appear to be the primary barriers to wider access and reuse.

Although faculty awareness of Open Access (OA) principles is gradually increasing, this awareness has not yet translated into consistent deposit behaviors. From the library perspective, this gap highlights a disconnect between institutional research production and library-mediated access mechanisms.

Library collections at UAC continue to rely predominantly on print holdings, supplemented by a small number of licensed electronic resources that are often vulnerable to budget fluctuations.

In this context, respondents increasingly perceive OA journals, open textbooks, and freely accessible databases as essential complements — and in some cases practical substitutes — for paid resources. Nevertheless, our findings suggest that the lack of a formal institutional repository policy, coupled with inconsistent metadata standards, significantly undermines the discoverability, interoperability, and long-term preservation of these resources.

Discussion

Rather than reiterating normative arguments in favor of Open Access, this discussion emphasizes practical integration into everyday collection development workflows. At UAC, OA and institutional repositories should not be treated merely as cost-saving alternatives, but as strategic assets that reshape how collections are built, maintained, and evaluated. This requires a gradual but deliberate shift — from ownership to access, from selection to curation, and from passive acquisition to active engagement with faculty as content producers.

Our analysis suggests that such a transition is as much cultural as it is technical. Librarians are increasingly positioned not only as selectors of external resources, but also as facilitators

of institutional knowledge dissemination. This expanded role aligns with contemporary collection development practices that emphasize visibility, impact, and sustainability over volume alone.

Quality assurance emerged as a central concern among librarians, reflecting apprehensions about the credibility and durability of OA resources. These concerns resonate with broader professional discussions that emphasize the need for transparent evaluation criteria, including peer-review mechanisms, publisher reputation, metadata quality, and platform sustainability.

From our perspective, addressing these concerns requires targeted capacity building. Training librarians to assess OA resources critically and embedding OA discovery tools into existing library systems can help normalize OA within collection development decisions rather than treating it as peripheral.

Lessons Learned

One key lesson from the UAC experience is that the successful integration of Open Access into collection development does not depend solely on technological infrastructure. It requires clear policies, shared standards, and sustained librarian engagement. When OA resources are actively curated, evaluated, and aligned with institutional priorities, they move from being ad hoc supplements to becoming integral components of a resilient and responsive academic library collection.

Proposed Framework

Based on the findings, a proposed framework for integrating OA and IRs into collection development at UAC includes:

1. **Policy Alignment:** Adoption of an institutional Open Access and repository policy explicitly linked to the library's collection development policy.
2. **Infrastructure:** Deployment or strengthening of an open-source institutional repository platform (e.g., DSpace) with standardized metadata and interoperability protocols.
3. **Content Integration:** Systematic identification, selection, and cataloging of high-quality OA resources alongside subscribed materials in the library discovery system.
4. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Advocacy and training programs for faculty and researchers on self-archiving, copyright, and open licenses.
5. **Assessment and Sustainability:** Continuous evaluation of OA resource usage, relevance, and impact, ensuring long-term preservation and institutional support.

This framework reflects contemporary calls for flexible, scalable, and user-centered collection development models.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Open Access and institutional repositories represent transformative opportunities for collection development at UAC. When strategically integrated, free scholarly resources can enhance access, visibility, and sustainability of academic collections while supporting the university's research mission. This article demonstrates that successful integration depends less on technology alone than on policy coherence, professional capacity, and sustained institutional commitment.



ATGthePodcast.com



The podcast linking publishers, vendors & librarians.

NEW EPISODES EVERY MONDAY



CHARLESTON-HUB.COM/MEDIA/PODCASTS/

It is recommended that UAC: (1) formally adopt an Open Access and institutional repository policy; (2) invest in repository infrastructure and continuous staff training; (3) systematically embed Open Access resources into routine collection development workflows; and (4) actively promote a culture of openness within the academic community. For collection librarians, this integration requires a deliberate shift from ownership-based acquisition toward a stewardship role that prioritizes curation, evaluation, and long-term access to openly available scholarly content. Through these measures, the UAC Library can position itself as a central actor in scholarly communication and knowledge dissemination in Benin and beyond.

Bibliographic References

Budapest Open Access Initiative. "Read the Budapest Open Access Initiative." 2002.

Crow, Raym. "The Case for Institutional Repositories: A SPARC Position Paper." ARL, no. 223 (August 2002): 1-4.

Dyas-Correia, Sharon, and Reggie Devakos. "Open Access and Collection Development Policies: Two Solitudes?" In Proceedings of the IFLA World Library and Information Congress. The Hague: IFLA, 2014.

Ezema, Ifeanyi J., and Omwoyo B. Onyancha. "Open Access Publishing in Africa: Advancing Research Outputs to Global Visibility." *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science* 27, no. 2 (2017): 97-115.

Horava, Tony. "Challenges and Possibilities for Collection Management in a Digital Age." *Library Resources & Technical Services* 54, no. 3 (2010): 142-152.

Lynch, Clifford A. "Institutional Repositories: Essential Infrastructure for Scholarship in the Digital Age." *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 3, no. 2 (2003): 327-336.

Linda L. Phillips, and Stephanie R. Williams. "Collection Development Embraces the Digital Age: A Review of the Literature, 1997-2003." *Library Resources & Technical Services* 48, no. 4 (2004): 273-299.

Pinfield, Stephen. "Making Open Access Work: The State of the Art in Providing Open Access to Scholarly Literature." *Online Information Review* 39, no. 5 (2015): 604-636.

Suber, Peter. *Open Access*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012. 🌱