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Exploring online repository software suitability for resource sharing at Makerere University

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Abstract:

Libraries have explored opportunities for successful resource-sharing initiatives. Makerere University Library (Maklib) is not an exception to the challenge. It is a daunting question that has called for a scan through available options. In pursuit of integrating ICTs in library functions, Maklib implemented an institutional repository (MakIR) in 2006. In 2014 Maklib upgraded MakIR to run on DSpace 4.2 version, which came with digital collection-discovery advantages that supported resource sharing. Two specific DSpace features were tested and proven to be useful for the resource-sharing purpose, namely: 'request a copy' and "email subscriptions". Between 2015 and 2016, the three Librarians who manage the repository reported to have received at least one email notification request every week, on average, for a copy of a document in MakIR collections from an online user. Given its online discoverability, DSpace-driven MakIR has proved its usability to support resource-sharing efforts. The repository and e-resources/periodicals library sections have developed a plan to carry out sensitization campaigns and training workshops for both Makerere University researchers and from the member institutions of the Consortium of Uganda University Libraries (CUUL). The paper analyses the extent of usability of the two DSpace repository software features for resource-sharing purpose.

Keywords: Resource-sharing, Institutional repositories.

Introduction

Using a descriptive and explanatory approach, this paper endeavours to highlight Maklib's efforts to explore usage of its repository as a resource-sharing platform, other similar examples of the same and finally attempts to indicate implications of this endeavor on academic libraries.

Some background

Makerere University (Mak) is the oldest and most prestigious university in East Africa. It opened its doors as a technical college in 1922. Having emerged as part of the then University of East Africa, Mak had linkages with University of London. Uganda had no national library until 2003. This meant that Makerere University Library (Maklib) was known as The Library in Uganda between 1949 at its inception and 2003 when the National Library of Uganda was inaugurated. As thus Maklib houses not only academic literature but also several national archives.

Since 2000, Maklib has subscribed to e-resource databases. However, the changing information needs landscape arising from the manifold research interests among the academics at Mak coupled with the sky-rocketing e-resource prices has necessitated the need for alternative and innovative ways for access. In concerted efforts, Makerere University Library (Maklib) led the way in mobilizing other Uganda university libraries to launch the Consortium of Uganda University Libraries (CUUL). An idea, which was birthed as a result of Maklib's personal experience of the biting e-resource prices, CUUL saw a kindled fire for joint subscription partnership in solving a shared challenge of e-resources access. The involved institutions have been pooling resources for this purpose. However, with the increasing e-resource prices and shrinking library budgets subscriptions are unable to meet all the e-resource demands. As the saying goes that "necessity is the mother of inventions" it has become apparent for Uganda libraries to innovate ways to tackle the challenge of e-resource access.

Literature exemplification of resource-sharing using repositories

Several instances have been reported, which encourage resource-sharing. Thelwall and Kousha (2016) highlight the uptake of Figshare, a research data sharing platform. With the advantage of immediate access to a researcher's outputs such as figures, graphs, etc Figshare gives promise of increased access to information resources to users especially those outside academia, many of whom are always locked out by the nature of scientific publication formats. This is so because of the manifold data visualization features available in Figshare.

Marvin (2015) cites the Cybertesis programme, which shows how Latin-American libraries have made use of the metadata harvesting feature of institutional repositories. It was reported that Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH) has made it possible for Latin-American academic libraries to share metadata of objects or documents available within their repositories hence increased resource sharing. This is what other libraries could explore rather than work individually.

In a published study Baich (2015) provides evidence to adduce the fact that despite contradictory opinion, open access repositories are useful platforms to increase resource-sharing. Baich's statistical analysis showed that the less the items were in open access the more higher the requests for open access resources, especially with materials, which should have been legally allowed in open access as they were past the copyright limitations.

Exploring repository software options for sharing of local resources at Makerere University (Mak)

Through the years of using Makerere University Institutional Repository (MakIR), Maklib discovered several software functionalities useful in enhancing access to Mak's research output. One of such functionalities is the "request a copy of document" option available with the DSpace repository software. It is useful especially for unregistered online public, many of

whom have been from consortium member institutions (CUUL). Once users are well identified the users can be given access to requested material available in MakIR. Going forward, it is hoped that all CUUL member institutions will upgrade their repository software to have such a functionality to enable sharing of resources locally. The “request a copy” feature has usefulness for any online user, which enhances the beyond the walls access globally.

Makerere University Institutional Repository (MakIR) has a hybrid form of research archive access. For the authors/students who have consented, their the items (dissertations) are available in open access. Where no consent has been signed, the full-text has remained in restricted access for purposes of maintaining the digital archive as mandated by the Mak.

Discussion of findings while exploring the resource-sharing options

Each repository librarian received at least one request for a restricted repository item per week between 2015 when MakIR received a version upgrade and mid 2016 when this evaluation was made. Requests for items in MakIR have varied by collections and research communities in MakIR.

However, of the requests received, Maklib is only able to serve just a few due to the copyright limitations. This is because many of the student dissertations, which make-up the biggest percentage of the materials in the repository left before providing consent to make their work publicly available. It means that affected users are often requested to visit the library to read the print copies. This called for a definite policy to guide repository management. Some progress has been made in library-faculty negotiations about an acceptable embargo period bearing in mind the fact that some researchers require some time to publish their works. A repository policy has been drafted and plans are underway to progress from incorporating feedback from academic platform debate to senate policy discussion and subsequently it will be passed into policy. With the repository policy, Maklib envisages an increase in the number of items publicly available for sharing among consortium members for the benefit of their users.

Implications for using the repository as a resource-sharing platform at Makerere University (Mak)

In Mak’s case, we evaluated and found that use of the repository request a document feature and collection subscription alert by email had the potential for increased resource-sharing. However, this will be possible with the following implications, among others.

Guiding policy on the need to have a guiding policy to share repository resources

The repository policy at Mak was still in draft form by the time of making this treatise and writing this paper. It is imperative to have the policy approved as soon as possible to provide a framework for resource-sharing among users who may be from Mak and CUUL institutions.

User and Submitter profiles

The ‘request a copy of the document’ feature assumed that the submitters were the authors. In Mak’s case librarians have been the submitters of items on behalf the authors who are both students and faculty. It will be necessary for Maklib to therefore verify user identities before granting access. Mak and CUUL researchers and students will be encouraged to subscribe in order for them to benefit from a current awareness service via the email alerts whenever new items have been archived in the repository.

Move into research data curation

Having benchmarked, it is natural that Maklib's next step is to explore research data curation, thereby enriching the repository and making it more resourceful for the users. This is quite a virgin area in Uganda, which is likely to require new thinking on the part of the Mak librarians.

Conclusion

There are on-going efforts to identify all issues, which need to be addressed and a full plan to exploit this resource-sharing opportunity shall be pursued especially to benefit users from consortium (CUUL) member institutions.

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