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Unlocking Knowledge: Professional Perspectives on Pakistan's Open Access Institutional Repositories

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Unlocking Knowledge: Professional Perspectives on Pakistan's Open Access Institutional Repositories

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Abstract

Open Access Institutional Repositories (OA-IRs) play a crucial role in disseminating scholarly research, yet their adoption in Pakistan remains limited. This study explores the status and awareness of OA-IRs in Pakistan through a professional perspective in public and private sector. Organizations showcase their intellectual works using the Open access institutional repository platform. Using quantitative based method the present study focuses on the current status and awareness of open access institutional repositories of Pakistan. Data was interpreted by using "content Analysis" technique and results has provided. Structured questionnaire has generated for the collection of data through Google form. Library professionals provided the response about status and awareness about IR. Results of the current study are based on the status and awareness of the IR in Pakistan. The study revealed the IR developments in Pakistan. The population of present study was seven institutions of Pakistan in different provinces of the country so a questionnaire sent to each professional by email. This study was mostly quantitative therefor, SPSS software have used in analyzing and interpreting the data for drawing the interference accordingly. Through this study it became clear that there is lack of OAIR in Pakistan. However, some of institutions have established OAIR in Pakistan. Absences of OAIR in universities have extensively affecting the status and awareness of OAIR. Additionally, institutional repositories serve an essential role in advancing knowledge and research in the country, as they provide a platform for sharing information and fostering collaboration between institutions and researchers. OAIR can play a valuable role in changing Pakistan into an advanced country.

Keywords: Open Access Institutional Repositories, Scholarly Communication, Information Dissemination, Library Professionals in Pakistan, Repository Awareness and Adoption

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Introduction

Traditional librarianship is being replaced by modern librarianship. Today, the most pressing issue is the shift in the global trend toward institutional repositories. "An institutional repository is a digital compilation of scholarly efforts produced by the members of a particular organization, such as a university or research institute," according to Asadi, Abdullah, Yah, and Nazir (2019). By making an institution's intellectual output accessible and conserving it for future generations, an institutional repository aims to increase the influence and exposure of its research. Research outputs such as articles, theses, dissertations, conference papers, and others can be found in institutional repositories, which usually have peer-reviewed content (Demetres, Delgado, & Wright, 2020). With Open Access (OA) emerging as a key model that eliminates financial and legal barriers to scholarly communication, the transition to a digitally connected academic environment has completely changed the way knowledge is produced and shared. OA encourages inclusion and fosters academic development by making research publicly available, especially in areas with low resources (Suber, 2012). This model relies heavily on Institutional Repositories (IRs), which are kept up to date by research institutions and universities and allow academic output to be preserved and shared. These repositories enhance research visibility, encourage collaboration, and contribute to global knowledge, with studies indicating that OA content often receives greater readership and citations (Piwowar et al., 2018).

Lynch (2003) an institutional repository's primary goals are to increase the exposure and influence of the institution's research, provide access to its intellectual output, and preserve it for future generations. Articles, theses and dissertations, conference papers, and other kinds of research outputs can all be found in an institutional repository's often peer-reviewed content. The management of IR is facilitated by open source software, including DSpace, ePrints.org, Fedora, and Bepress. All of the software is open source except bepress, provides capabilities for managing digital assets, and is commonly used as an IR platform. Large and small universities, colleges of higher education, and research centers, including those in Pakistan, have implemented and are using it. All of the software, with the exception of Bepress, is free and open source. Bepress interacts with ProQuest's library of E-theses and dissertations (ETD) through its commercial software partnership with the information and learning platform Digital Commons@ (Bhandi and Vishala, 2007). Digital Commons@ software is being used for IR in Pakistan by Agha Khan University (Barton and Waters, 2004). Only a few universities in Pakistan actively maintain institutional repositories, but in the global north they have grown (Ali & Richardson, 2017). Development is hampered by issues like poor infrastructure, low knowledge, a lack of institutional support, and a lack of standardization (Khokhar, Rafiq, & Malik, 2023). Research sharing and academic advancement are hampered by the fact that many faculty members are ignorant of their institution's repository or the advantages of open access (Ali & Richardson, 2017; Khokhar, Rafiq, & Malik, 2023).

This study aims to explore the current status and awareness among academic professionals in Pakistan regarding institutional repositories and open access initiatives. By collecting professional perspectives from various higher education institutions across the country, the article seeks to uncover key challenges and opportunities related to the adoption of IRs. In doing so, it also sheds light on how greater awareness and strategic engagement with OA practices can enhance research dissemination and academic collaboration on a national and international scale (Suber, 2012). In Pakistan, academic institutions have gradually embraced OA-IRs, yet their implementation varies due to disparities in awareness, funding, and administrative support Siddique, & Mahmood, (2015). This article analyzes the current state of OA-IRs in Pakistan, examining their growth, researcher participation, and persistent challenges.

Objectives of the study

- 1) To recognize status of IR in the mainland of Pakistan
- 2) To find out the level of awareness of library professionals regarding IR

Research Question

- Q.1 What is the status of IR in Pakistan?
- Q.2 What is the level of awareness of library professionals related to IR?
- Q.3 What is the medium of awareness about IR?
- Q.4 What types of items are there in Pakistani repositories?

Literature review

The literature on Open Access and Institutional Repositories has grown significantly in recent years. According to Lynch (2003), institutional repositories are digital collections that preserve and disseminate the intellectual output of an institution. They serve as essential tools for enhancing the accessibility and impact of research.

Having an institutional repository has many advantages. It gives scholars a stage on which to present their findings and raise their profile and influence (Puspita, Roisah, & Lestari, 2024). It provides a central site for institutions to access and maintain their intellectual work, which can boost their standing and reputation (Asadi, Abdullah, Yah, & Nazir, 2019). But it's crucial to make sure that the information in institutional archives is unique and free of plagiarism. Before being submitted to the repository, all deposited works should undergo a comprehensive plagiarism check and adhere to proper attribution and citation guidelines (Puspita, Roisah, & Lestari, 2024). This preserves the repository's integrity as well as the institution's and its researchers' credibility.

In the context of developing nations, Chan et al. (2005) emphasize the potential of OAIRs to democratize access to knowledge and foster academic growth. However, research also highlights challenges such as lack of awareness, insufficient funding, and inadequate technical infrastructure (Dulle & Minishi-Majanja, 2009).

In Pakistan, efforts have been made to implement OAIRs, particularly in higher education institutions. However, studies like those by Hussain, Ali, & Jan, (2025) indicate

a lack of strategic planning and low awareness among faculty and LIS professionals. These limitations impede the broader adoption and utilization of OA platforms. Pakistan's higher education sector has seen a steady increase in the establishment of OAIRs, largely driven by initiatives from the Higher Education Commission (HEC). By 2023, more than 50 universities, including prominent institutions like Agha Khan University and COMSATS University had launched their own repositories (HEC, 2022). However, many of these repositories remain underutilized, with infrequent updates and low researcher contributions (Ahmad, Asad, & Khan, 2023).

Research by Rafiq, Ameen, & Jabeen (2018) indicates that only a small fraction of Pakistani scholars actively submit their work to IRs, often due to a lack of clear incentives or submission procedures. Additionally, the absence of a unified national repository system restricts the country's ability to consolidate and promote its research output efficiently.

Awareness of OA-IRs among Pakistani academics is still limited. A study conducted across multiple universities found that fewer than half of faculty members were fully aware of their institution's repository (Rafiq, 2022). Many researchers continue to prefer traditional publishing channels, overlooking the advantages of OA, such as broader visibility and higher citation potential (Gargouri et al., 2010). Despite these developments in repository adoption is still inconsistent across the country. According to research conducted by Siddique & Mahmood (2015), only about 38% of universities in Pakistan have functional repositories, and many of them are not regularly maintained or updated. This uneven progress limits the accessibility and global reach of Pakistani research output.

Institutional repositories (IRs) have become crucial components of academic institutions globally, serving as platforms for preserving and disseminating scholarly outputs. In the context of developing countries like Pakistan, the status of IRs is still emerging, with varying levels of awareness and adoption across different institutions. Research indicates that while there is a rising recognition of the importance of IRs in preserving academic content, many institutions in Pakistan face significant challenges in their implementation and use (Mirza, Arif, Ullah, & Hamid, 2024).

Awareness of IRs among faculty and researchers is generally little, which affects the rate of content submission and overall participation in these repositories. A study by Rafiq (2022) underlines that despite efforts to endorse the benefits of IRs, many academics remain unaware of how to contribute to and utilize these platforms effectively. This lack of awareness is compounded by the lack of strong policies and institutional support, which further hinders the widespread adoption of IRs.

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative nature and used survey method of questionnaire to gather data from selected LIS professionals working in academic and research institutions across Pakistan. The targeted population includes librarians related to OAIR of Pakistan. The obtained data were analyzed with the help of SPSS.

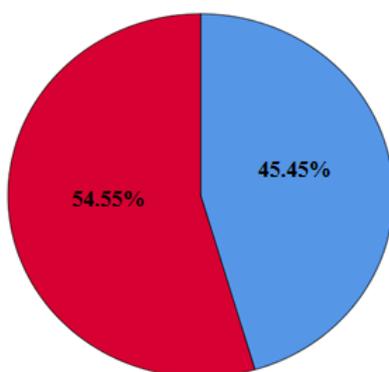
A structured questionnaire was distributed electronically to participants, focusing on key areas such as:

- Current status of OAIRs in their institutions
- Awareness of open access and institutional repositories

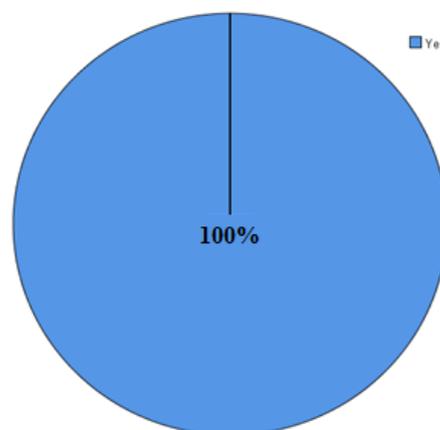
Data analysis and interpretation

The current study's findings are based on Pakistan's awareness and status of the IR. OAIR has the potential to significantly contribute to Pakistan's transformation into a developed nation. Regrettably, OAIR has not received any governmental advancement in Pakistan. Few attempts are made by institutions or volunteers. Since the study was quantitative in nature, it used a questionnaire to gather information from Pakistani higher education institutions about their awareness and status regarding Open Access Institutional Repositories. An online survey was used to gather quantitative data from professionals employed at Pakistan's seven public and private universities and institutions affiliated with the Higher Education Commission (HEC). According to the study's nature, the content analysis has proven to be quite beneficial in fully exposing the study's goals. Eleven respondents' responses are covered. Additionally, the results have been displayed both graphically (pie graph) and tabulated. The demographic distribution of respondents is covered in the first section, followed by recognition status and awareness of Pakistan's open access institutional repositories in the second, respectively.

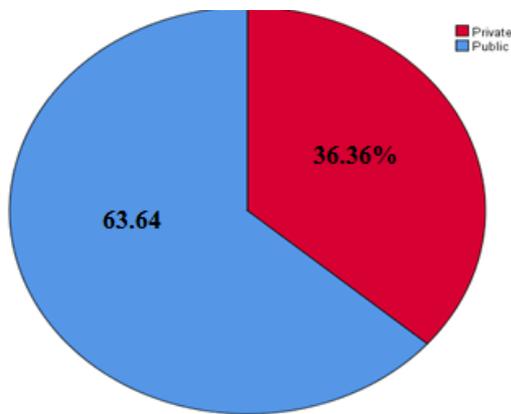
Gender



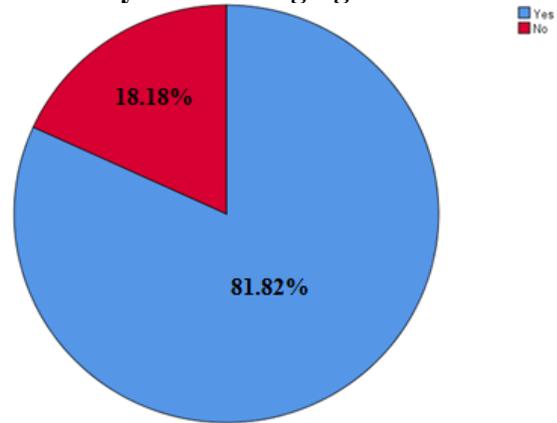
Have you setup your institutional repository



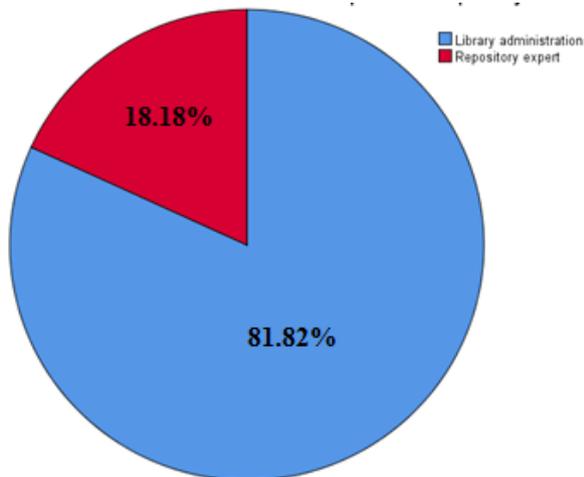
Type of Institution



Do you have formal policy that Guides you in managing IR

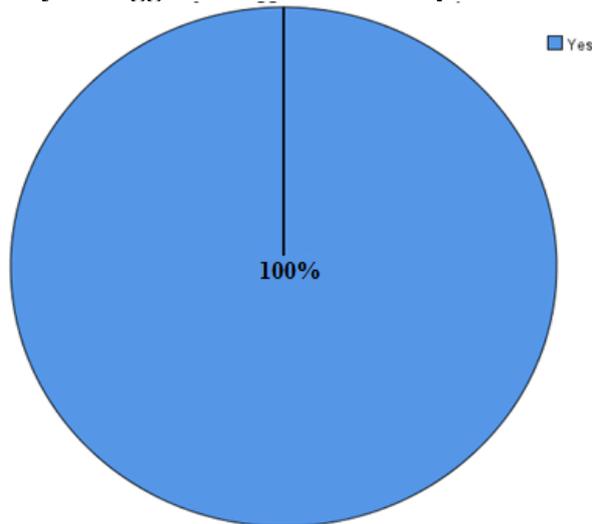


Who decides what to put into the repository?

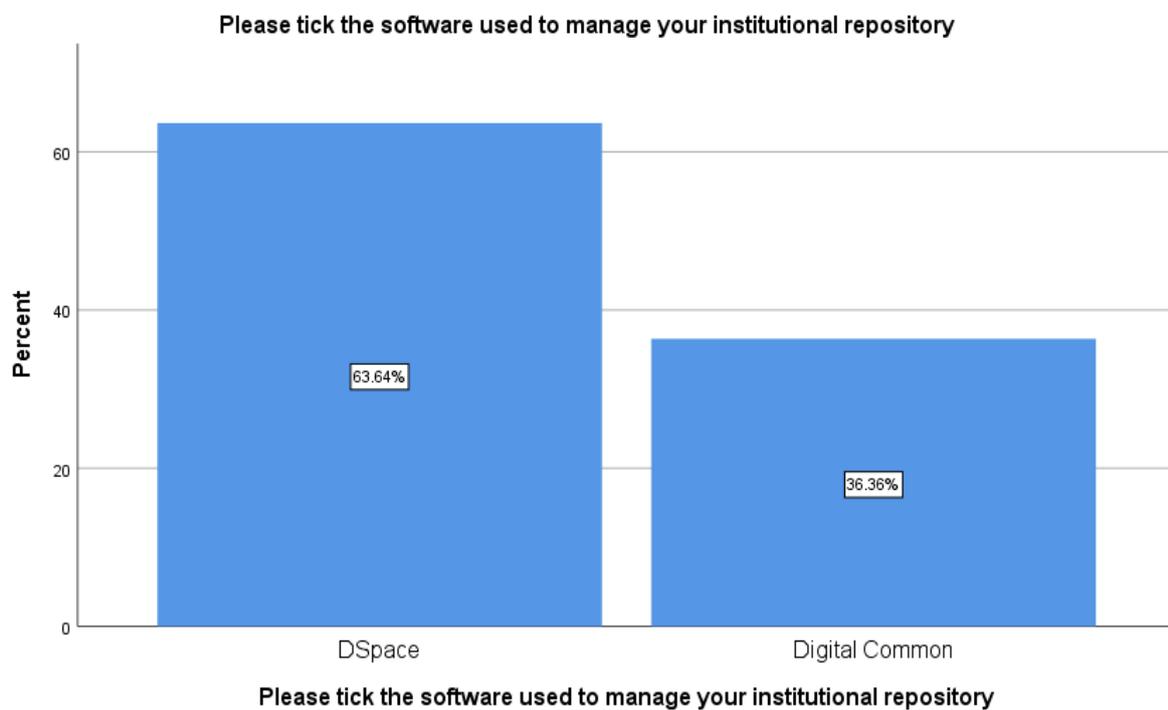


What is the medium of awareness about IR

Do you suggest that IR increase professional visibility?



Software used to manage institutional repository

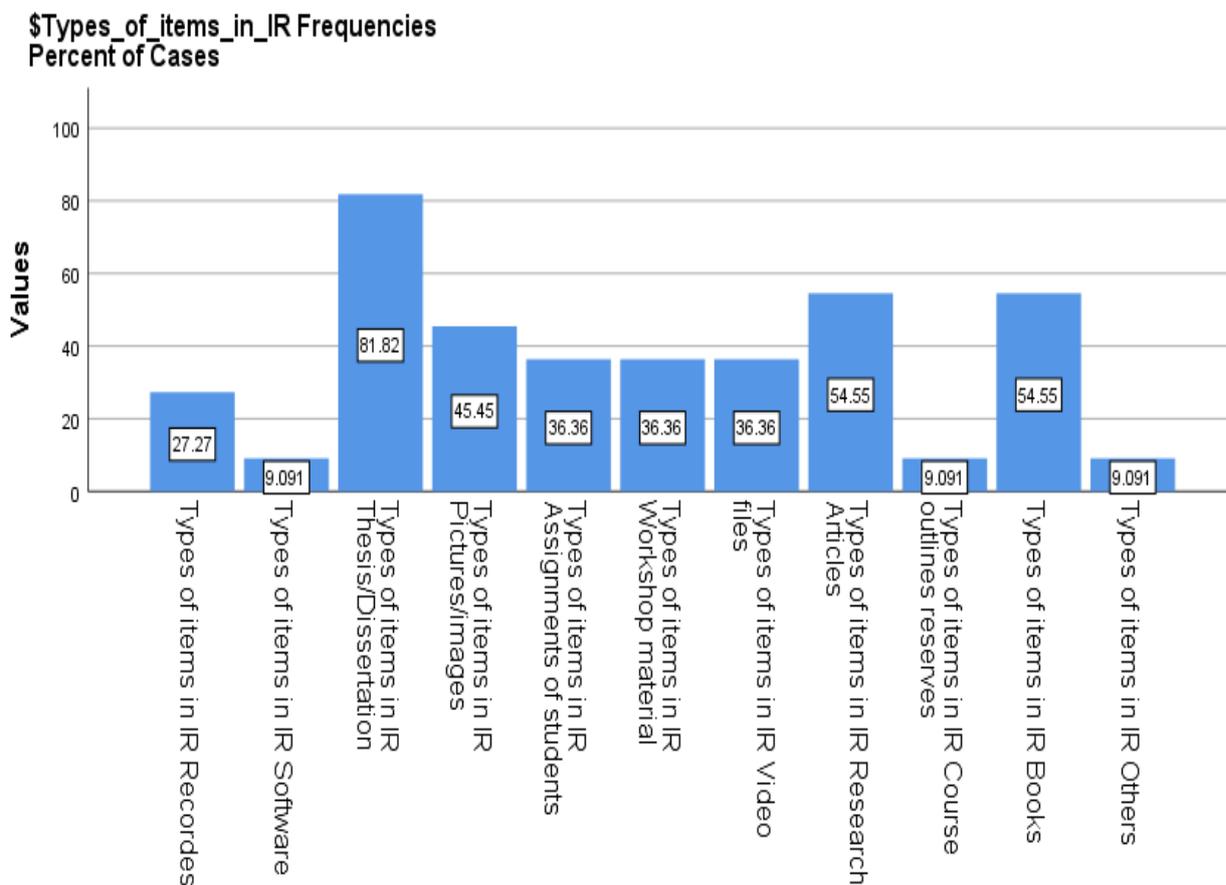


Types of items in IR Frequencies

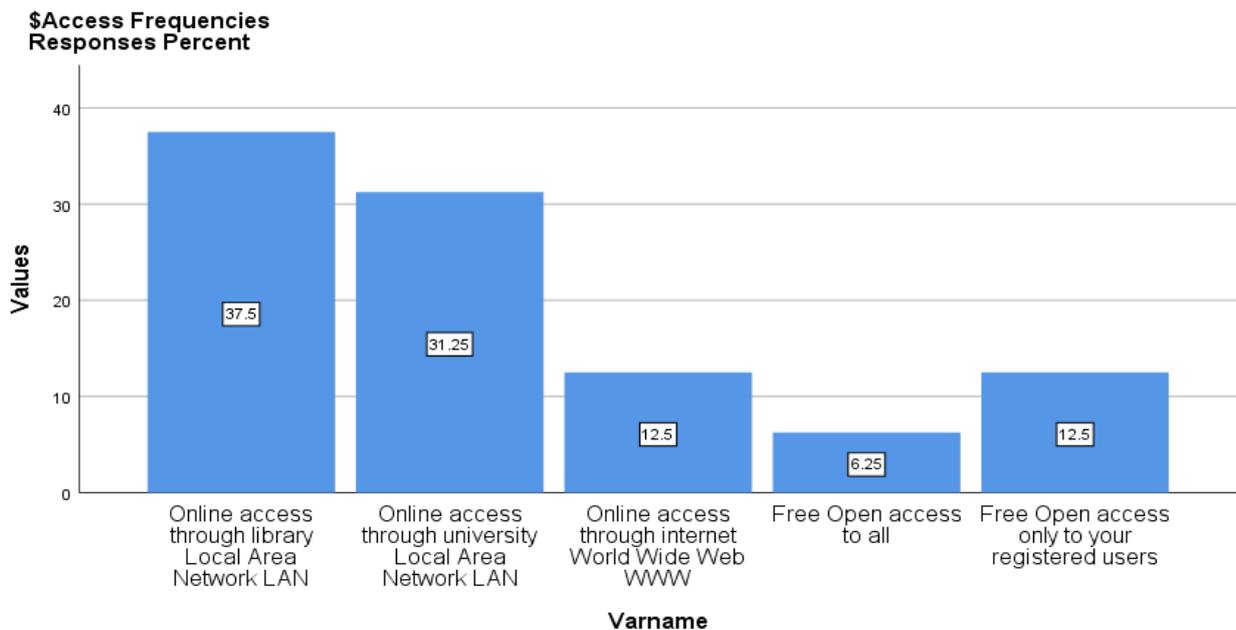
	N	Responses	
		Percent	Percent of Cases
Recordes	3	6.8%	27.3%
Software	1	2.3%	9.1%
Thesis/Dissertation	9	20.5%	81.8%
Pictures/images	5	11.4%	45.5%

	Assignments of students	4	9.1%	36.4%
	Workshop material	4	9.1%	36.4%
	Video files	4	9.1%	36.4%
Types of items in IR ^a	Research Articles	6	13.6%	54.5%
	Course outlines reserves	1	2.3%	9.1%
	Books	6	13.6%	54.5%
	Others	1	2.3%	9.1%
	Total	44	100.0%	400.0%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.



Access to items in the IR to users.



Discussion

Preliminary results indicate that while a majority of LIS professionals are familiar with the concept of open access, fewer have an in-depth understanding of institutional repositories. Only a limited number of institutions in Pakistan have fully operational OAIRs, with most still in the developmental or planning stages.

Professionals cited several barriers, including lack of institutional support, limited training opportunities, and inadequate infrastructure. However, there is a strong willingness among respondents to adopt and promote OA practices, provided there is more support in terms of policy, funding, and capacity building.

Conclusion

As the global academic community continues to emphasize openness and equitable access to knowledge, Pakistan must enhance its institutional frameworks to support inclusive and sustainable knowledge dissemination. This study investigated the current status of Open Access Institutional Repositories (OAIR) in Pakistan, with a particular focus on awareness, implementation, software usage, content management, and policy frameworks within academic institutions.

The findings reveal that the majority of institutional repositories are maintained by public sector institutions, indicating a widespread institutional awareness and adoption of OAIR. A significant number of respondents confirmed the establishment of institutional repositories within their respective organizations. Notably, DSpace emerged as the most commonly implemented repository software, with Digital Commons also being used by a smaller number of institutions. Most repositories are accessible via local area networks, ensuring internal institutional access to digital content.

Library administrations play a central role in determining repository content, highlighting their authority and responsibility in managing institutional knowledge. In the majority of cases the decision-making process is led by library professionals, while repository experts support content selection and technical management. The presence of formal institutional repository policies across most institutions demonstrates a structured approach to repository governance. These policies typically cover content types, submission processes, copyright, intellectual property rights, and long-term preservation strategies. Theses and dissertations represent the most frequently archived content, followed by research articles, books, multimedia files, institutional documents, and other scholarly and administrative materials. The study also finds that access to repository content is predominantly provided through library local area network (LAN).

In terms of awareness, the Internet stands out as the primary medium for disseminating information about institutional repositories, with social media further enhancing engagement and visibility. Importantly, all respondents acknowledged that institutional repositories significantly contribute to professional visibility, reinforcing their value as essential tools for academic communication.

This research highlights the importance of a coordinated national strategy to advance open access initiatives in Pakistan. Strengthening institutional policies, raising awareness among library and information science professionals, and investing in infrastructure and training are key steps toward achieving a robust open access environment. Future studies should explore the impact of institutional leadership and policy-making in shaping open access practices across the country.

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