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THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL REPOSITORIES IN THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE



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THE ROLE

OF INSTITUTIONAL REPOSITORIES IN THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE

EL PAPEL DE LOS REPOSITARIOS INSTITUCIONALES EN LA DEMOCRATIZACIÓN DEL SABER

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ABSTRACT

Institutional repositories have become established as strategic tools for promoting the democratization of knowledge in higher education. These systems allow for the hosting, organization, preservation, and dissemination of scientific articles, theses, conference papers, and other digital resources, ensuring their long-term availability and increasing the visibility of authors and the institutions that support them. This article examines, through a literature review, the most significant benefits of these platforms, including digital preservation, transparency in research processes, and the promotion of interdisciplinary collaboration. It also identifies challenges that persist in their implementation and consolidation, such as technological limitations, lack of interoperability, heterogeneous institutional practices, and cultural barriers related to resistance to open access. The analysis highlights the importance of establishing clear institutional policies that regulate the deposit of materials, as well as promoting information literacy among faculty and researchers to strengthen the effective use of repositories. It also underscores the need to adopt international metadata standards and digital preservation mechanisms that guarantee the integrity and continuity of the content. The study concludes that institutional repositories represent essential infrastructures for building a more inclusive, sustainable academic ecosystem oriented towards the responsible management of knowledge, contributing significantly to the transformation of contemporary scientific communication.

Keywords:

Institutional repositories, open access, democratization of knowledge, digital preservation, scientific communication.

RESUMEN

Los repositorios institucionales se han consolidado como herramientas estratégicas para promover la democratización del conocimiento en el ámbito de la educación superior. Estos sistemas permiten alojar, organizar, preservar y difundir artículos científicos, tesis, ponencias y otros recursos digitales, asegurando su disponibilidad a largo plazo y aumentando la visibilidad de los autores y de las instituciones que los respaldan. El artículo examina, mediante una revisión documental, los beneficios más destacados de estas plataformas, entre ellos la preservación digital, la transparencia de los procesos investigativos y el impulso a la colaboración interdisciplinaria. Asimismo, se identifican desafíos que persisten en su implementación y consolidación, tales como limitaciones tecnológicas, falta de interoperabilidad, prácticas institucionales heterogéneas y barreras culturales relacionadas con la resistencia al acceso abierto. El análisis resalta la importancia de establecer políticas institucionales claras que regulen el depósito de materiales, así como de promover la alfabetización informacional entre docentes e investigadores para fortalecer el uso efectivo de los repositorios. También subraya la necesidad de adoptar estándares internacionales de metadatos y mecanismos de preservación digital que garanticen la integridad y continuidad de los contenidos. El estudio concluye que los repositorios institucionales representan infraestructuras esenciales para construir un ecosistema académico más inclusivo, sostenible y orientado a la gestión responsable del conocimiento, aportando significativamente a la transformación de la comunicación científica contemporánea.

Palabras clave:

Repositorios institucionales, acceso abierto, democratización del conocimiento, preservación digital, comunicación científica.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of academic output worldwide has highlighted profound inequalities in access to scientific knowledge. Although the volume of articles, theses, reports, and data generated by higher education institutions has steadily increased, much of this material remains inaccessible to researchers, faculty, students, and the general public who lack institutional subscriptions to specialized journals or expensive databases.

This situation reproduces historical gaps between countries of the Global North and South and limits the circulation of knowledge as a public good, a principle defended by international organizations such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2021), which emphasizes that knowledge should be considered a shared social resource.

In this context, institutional repositories emerge as one of the most powerful tools for promoting open access. According to Suber (2012), the open access movement is based on the idea that publicly funded research should be freely available to all of society. Repositories, therefore, represent a strategic way to freely store, organize, and disseminate the intellectual output of universities and research centers, helping to overcome the economic and technical barriers that have historically limited the circulation of knowledge. Lynch (2003) points out that these repositories are not just digital archives, but academic infrastructures that consolidate intellectual memory and enhance the visibility of authors.

Furthermore, institutional repositories promote the democratization of knowledge by offering a space where diverse types of documents converge: articles, theses, conference papers, teaching materials, multimedia resources, and datasets. This inclusive nature responds to the need to broaden the forms of scientific communication, a concern highlighted by Borgman (2015), who argues that contemporary science demands more open, collaborative, and transparent models that allow for access, validation, and reuse of knowledge.

The democratization of knowledge is not limited solely to the free availability of documents. It also involves strengthening individual and collective capacities to appropriate knowledge and use it for decision-making, innovation, and the development of critical thinking. Along these lines, Chan et al. (2002) assert that open access to knowledge contributes to generating more informed and participatory communities, capable of actively engaging with scientific production. Institutional repositories, by increasing the visibility of local research and facilitating its global dissemination, allow students, faculty, professionals, public institutions, and the general public to access information relevant to their education and development.

Another key contribution of repositories is their long-term preservation function. The volatility of digital platforms,

technological changes, and the obsolescence of digital formats (Chávez et al., 2025) put large volumes of scientific output at risk. Therefore, digital preservation is fundamental to guaranteeing the historical continuity of accumulated knowledge. According to Lavoie (2014), repositories offer robust mechanisms that ensure the conservation, integrity, and future availability of intellectual output, strengthening the sustainability of the academic ecosystem.

Marsh (2015), for his part, analyzes how institutional repositories act as catalysts in academic communication, highlighting their role in the visibility and accessibility of scientific output. He argues that these repositories not only store documents but also facilitate the dissemination of research results to broader audiences, promoting interdisciplinary collaboration and accelerating knowledge transfer. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the adoption of these platforms improves transparency in scientific communication, strengthening academic integrity and fostering equity in access to information.

Jantz & Wilson (2008) delve into the relationship between faculty deposits in institutional repositories and academic marketing strategies. They point out that repositories can transform traditional scholarly communication by offering more direct and democratic access to intellectual output. The authors emphasize that, in addition to preserving research, these platforms enhance authors' visibility and allow for the measurement of the impact of their work, while also contributing to the reform of publishing models that have historically restricted the circulation of knowledge to limited audiences.

Fiala & Diamandis (2019) examine the democratization of scientific publishing and argue that open access, enhanced by institutional repositories, is essential for reducing economic and geographical barriers to knowledge dissemination. According to the authors, these platforms allow publicly funded research to reach all of society, promoting equity and inclusion in science. They also emphasize that the open availability of scientific information not only broadens the participation of the global academic community but also strengthens innovation and evidence-based development.

Bashir et al. (2021) highlight how the evolution of institutional repositories contributes to reducing academic elitism by ensuring that the intellectual output of all institutions, regardless of their prestige, is publicly accessible. The authors emphasize that the effective implementation of these platforms requires clear research management strategies, open access policies, and promotion among academics. Consequently, repositories become fundamental tools for addressing historical inequalities in the visibility and dissemination of academic research, fostering more inclusive scientific communication.

According to these studies, institutional repositories have become essential tools for expanding access to knowledge, strengthening scientific transparency, and promoting educational equity. Their relevance is situated within a global context that demands more democratic, open, and collaborative information models, especially in regions where structural inequalities limit access to scientific information.

Institutional repositories have also proven to be fundamental tools for the dissemination and management of academic knowledge, as they allow an institution's scientific output to be accessible, retrievable, and reusable by diverse audiences, both within and outside academia. These platforms contribute to expanding the visibility of researchers and their work, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and the development of more integrated knowledge networks. Furthermore, they function as mechanisms for the democratization of knowledge by offering open access to scientific information, thus reducing the economic, geographical, and institutional barriers that have traditionally limited the circulation of knowledge and enabling publicly funded research to reach society at large.

The existence of repositories also strengthens transparency and academic integrity by ensuring the long-term digital preservation of documents, research data, theses, and other materials, protecting the institution's intellectual heritage and guaranteeing its availability for future generations. At the same time, these platforms challenge traditional publishing models, promoting an environment in which scholarly output is not concentrated exclusively in high-impact journals or elite institutions, but is distributed more equitably and accessibly.

The effective implementation of repositories requires clear research management policies, academic marketing strategies, author training, and metadata standardization, which maximize the visibility and impact of deposited documents. Above all, they strengthen scientific communication, foster academic inclusion, and contribute to the development of a more open, participatory, and equitable knowledge ecosystem, where information is not limited to a select group but becomes a shared resource that can drive innovation, education, and evidence-based decision-making.

Thus, the objective of this article is to analyze the role of institutional repositories in the democratization of knowledge, examining their theoretical foundations, their benefits, their structural challenges and their contribution to open access and equity in the distribution of knowledge in educational institutions.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical approach, aimed at examining the role of institutional repositories in the democratization of knowledge.

Since the study's objective is to understand the theoretical foundations, benefits, challenges, and contributions of these platforms to open access, a design based on document review and critical analysis of specialized literature was employed.

The corpus of analysis consisted of scientific articles, technical reports, academic books, international declarations, and empirical studies published between 2002 and 2025, selected according to criteria of thematic relevance, currency, impact in the field of digital repositories, and pertinence for the study of open access. Academic databases such as Scopus and Web of Science were consulted. Science, Google Scholar and institutional repositories of recognized universities, which made it possible to identify representative research on digital preservation, interoperability, open access culture and academic knowledge management.

The methodological strategy included three phases:

1. **Information gathering:** identification and selection of key literature related to open access, digital infrastructures, institutional policies and repository management models.
2. **Content analysis:** thematic organization of information around the conceptual axes of the study: theoretical foundations, benefits, structural challenges, and contribution to the democratization of knowledge. This was achieved using a thematic coding process that allowed for the comparison of perspectives, the identification of commonalities, and the recognition of conceptual trends.
3. **Interpretive synthesis:** integration of theoretical and empirical findings to construct a critical analysis that allows understanding the current role of institutional repositories in educational institutions and their potential to reduce barriers to access to knowledge.

This methodological approach allowed for a comprehensive examination of the phenomenon, integrating theoretical contributions and empirical evidence that support the discussion developed in the article. It also enabled a comparison of different repository experiences and models, identifying both their contributions and the limitations that affect their capacity to democratize scientific information. Overall, the methodology employed ensures a rigorous and well-founded analysis of the relevance of institutional repositories in contemporary processes of knowledge production, preservation, and dissemination.

DEVELOPMENT

Institutional repositories are digital platforms managed by universities, research centers, and other academic institutions that allow them to store, preserve, and disseminate the intellectual output generated within the institution. These systems are not limited to collections of articles but also encompass theses, technical reports, teaching materials, research data, conference papers, and other types

of documents that are part of academic activity (Lynch, 2003). Their main function is to ensure that the knowledge produced is accessible, retrievable, and reusable in the long term, thus becoming essential infrastructures for open science and the democratization of knowledge (Borgman, 2015).

Key characteristics of repositories include interoperability, digital preservation, metadata standardization, and compliance with open access policies. Interoperability allows repositories to connect with national and international systems, promoting the global visibility of deposited resources. Digital preservation ensures the integrity of materials over time, preventing information loss due to technological changes or the cessation of publications (Lavoie, 2014). Finally, metadata standardization and the adoption of open access policies make information easily searchable and accessible, not only to the academic community but also to professionals, students, and the general public (Suber, 2012).

The concept of democratizing knowledge implies that scientific information and knowledge should be freely and equitably available without economic, geographic, or institutional barriers. Institutional repositories become a strategic tool for achieving this goal, enabling open access to documents that were traditionally only available through subscription or payment (Chan et al., 2002). This universal access not only benefits researchers in resource-limited institutions but also strengthens continuing education, fosters innovation, and contributes to the development of evidence-based public policies.

According to Suber (2012), the open access movement is based on the idea that publicly funded research should be freely available to society, eliminating dependence on traditional publishing models that limit the circulation of knowledge. In this sense, institutional repositories function as a mechanism that integrates principles of equity, transparency, and sustainability, allowing information produced within an institution to not be confined to the walls of academia, but to reach global audiences (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021).

Institutional repositories offer numerous benefits for researchers, faculty, students, and society at large. For researchers, these systems increase the visibility of their publications, boost citations of their work, and facilitate international collaboration (Lynch, 2003). For example, a study by Chan et al. (2002) demonstrates that the open dissemination of scientific articles and data fosters knowledge networks, the replicability of experiments, and innovation in various academic fields.

For students, repositories represent a valuable source of academic information, allowing access to materials that enrich learning, foster independent research, and facilitate the preparation of high-quality academic work (Borgman, 2015). Furthermore, the public directly benefits

from having access to scientific information that can be applied in social, economic, and health contexts, reducing the gap between academic output and informed decision-making in society (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021).

A fundamental aspect is the preservation of institutional and scientific memory. The loss of academic materials due to editorial changes, journal closures, or the degradation of physical media is a constant risk. Institutional repositories mitigate this vulnerability, ensuring that the documents, data, and materials generated remain available for future generations (Lavoie, 2014). This is especially relevant for local or regional research that, without an institutional repository, could become invisible globally.

Despite their benefits, institutional repositories face significant challenges that limit their effectiveness in democratizing knowledge. One of the main problems is financial and technical sustainability. Maintaining servers, updated software, digital preservation policies, and trained staff requires recurring resources that are not always available in all institutions (Lynch, 2003). A lack of funding can compromise the continuity of service and limit the repository's impact.

Another significant challenge is the institutional culture surrounding document deposit. Many researchers are unaware of the benefits of repositories or consider the deposit process laborious and irrelevant to their academic careers (Borgman, 2015). This results in incomplete coverage of intellectual output, reducing the effectiveness of the repository as an open access tool. Therefore, raising awareness and training authors on the importance of self-archiving is critical to ensuring the repository's representativeness.

Interoperability and metadata quality are also significant challenges. Without adequate standards, documents may not be easily searchable or integrable into aggregator platforms, limiting their visibility and reuse (Lavoie, 2014). Furthermore, legal restrictions stemming from copyright and publisher contracts can prevent the full dissemination of certain materials, affecting equity in access to knowledge (Suber, 2012).

One element to consider is that the availability of documents does not guarantee their effective use. For the democratization of knowledge to be real, repositories must be accompanied by training, dissemination, and contextualized adaptation strategies for resources, so that different types of users can find, understand, and apply the available information (Chan et al., 2002).

According to Barba-Salazar et al. (2024), digital repositories in higher education institutions offer significant advantages by providing a centralized space for the preservation and availability of academic information. These repositories increase the visibility of research, allow the dissemination of knowledge beyond institutional boundaries, and

facilitate open access, thus contributing to the democratization of knowledge. However, the authors caution that their effectiveness depends on various factors, such as adequate technological infrastructure, staff training, and the willingness of academics to deposit their work, which can limit the reach and impact of the repository if not managed properly.

Andrés et al. (2020) emphasize that the success of institutional repositories depends not only on technical aspects but is also closely linked to social and cultural factors. The implementation of robust technological systems, interoperability between platforms, and the use of metadata standards are essential to guarantee the accessibility and visibility of documents. At the same time, the motivation of researchers, the institutional open access policy, and academic culture play a critical role in the effective use of repositories, as they determine the degree to which these become tools for collaboration, dissemination, and democratization of knowledge.

Bashir et al. (2021) point out that the evolution of institutional repositories has been driven by the need to reduce academic elitism, ensuring that the intellectual output of all institutions, regardless of their prestige, is publicly visible and accessible. They emphasize that the implementation of open access policies, the efficient management of research resources, and the active promotion of repositories among academics are key strategies for fostering equity in scientific communication. This allows researchers from less recognized institutions to disseminate their work, increasing inclusion and strengthening academic diversity.

González-Pérez et al. (2021) emphasize that improving repositories through a user-centered approach is fundamental to ensuring their usability and effectiveness. By identifying satisfaction indicators, optimizing navigation, and ensuring clarity in information presentation, repositories can maximize their usefulness for students, faculty, and researchers. The authors highlight that a user-centered design not only improves access to and reuse of resources but also increases the active participation of the academic community and strengthens the integration of repositories into educational and research processes.

Bamgbose et al. (2025) argue that user trust is a determining factor for the acceptance and effective use of digital repositories. The perceived reliability of the system, data security, document authenticity, and transparency in preservation processes directly influence researchers' willingness to deposit their work and use the available resources. In this regard, the authors emphasize that strengthening institutional and technological trust is crucial for maximizing the impact and effectiveness of repositories, especially in contexts where the adoption of digital technologies still faces cultural and organizational challenges.

Kumar (2022) demonstrates that, in the context of higher education in India, institutional repositories are essential

for fostering open access and the dissemination of academic knowledge. These repositories facilitate collaboration among institutions, promote the transfer of scientific and educational information, and enable the creation of more inclusive and equitable knowledge networks. The author emphasizes that the implementation of repositories contributes to academic transparency and the democratization of knowledge, strengthening education and research in environments where access to resources may be limited.

Demetres et al. (2020) show that repositories directly impact researchers' academic practices by increasing the visibility of their work, promoting interdisciplinary collaboration, and strengthening article citations. Furthermore, these spaces facilitate the long-term preservation of scientific output and encourage information reuse, thus establishing themselves as strategic tools for innovation and knowledge generation. The authors emphasize that repositories allow scientific findings to be shared more quickly and efficiently, benefiting the entire academic community.

Shukla & Ahmad (2018) point out that the use of repositories transforms how researchers communicate, preserve, and reuse their findings. By offering quick and direct access to scientific output, these platforms foster interdisciplinary collaboration, accelerate the dissemination of knowledge, and contribute to the integration of science in local and global contexts. They also emphasize that the use of repositories promotes more open and collaborative academic practices, reinforcing the culture of open access and cooperation among researchers.

Symulevich & Hamilton (2022) demonstrate that during the COVID-19 pandemic, institutional repositories proved to be critical tools for maintaining academic and scientific continuity. The availability of digital resources enabled the realization of educational activities, such as student symposia, that would otherwise have been canceled. This demonstrates the adaptability of repositories and their strategic value in crisis situations, ensuring the dissemination of information and uninterrupted access to education.

Vasanthan et al. (2024) highlight that repositories represent a modern approach to managing academic resources, integrating storage, organization, and efficient access to information. These platforms optimize the management of intellectual output, facilitate open access, and ensure the long-term preservation of academic documents, consolidating a more efficient and sustainable knowledge management model in higher education.

Finally, Kankam et al. (2024) argue that in developing countries, institutional repositories are essential for disseminating scientific information and promoting open access. They facilitate researchers sharing their findings with broader academic communities, reducing barriers to access and strengthening equity in scientific communication. Furthermore, these spaces contribute to building

more inclusive knowledge ecosystems, fostering innovation, education, and sustainable scientific development.

Institutional repositories have become essential tools for managing, preserving, and disseminating academic output in higher education. They function as centralized platforms that allow for the storage and organization of documents, theses, articles, and other academic materials, ensuring their long-term availability and facilitating open access for students, faculty, researchers, and the general public. Their implementation improves research visibility, strengthens interdisciplinary collaboration, and promotes knowledge transfer, contributing to the democratization of knowledge and the reduction of economic, geographic, and technological barriers that have traditionally limited the circulation of scientific information.

These platforms not only guarantee the digital preservation of documents but also foster more open and collaborative academic practices, transforming how researchers communicate, reuse, and share their findings. By enabling quick and direct access to information, repositories enhance the integration of knowledge in local and global contexts, strengthening innovation, education, and evidence-based research. Furthermore, they help reduce academic elitism by offering equitable visibility to institutions of varying prestige and resources, allowing the intellectual output of less recognized universities to have the same dissemination potential as that of established institutions.

User trust in repositories is a critical factor for their success, as the perception of reliability, data security, document authenticity, and transparency in preservation processes influence researchers' willingness to deposit and use their work. Similarly, implementing a user-centered design improves usability, navigation, and satisfaction, increasing student and academic participation and maximizing the impact of deposited information. This approach enables repositories to function not only as information repositories but also as active tools for managing academic knowledge.

In developing countries or during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, repositories have proven essential for ensuring the continuity of education and research. Their ability to provide remote access to scientific and educational resources allows for the continuation of academic activities, symposia, and research projects, ensuring that intellectual output remains accessible and relevant even under adverse circumstances. In this way, institutional repositories contribute to building more inclusive, accessible, and sustainable knowledge ecosystems, fostering equity in access to information and strengthening the participation of all members of the academic community in the generation and dissemination of knowledge.

Institutional repositories represent a modern and efficient model for managing academic resources, integrating the storage, organization, access, and long-term preservation of information. Their existence not only transforms scientific and academic communication but also fosters innovation, transparency, and equity in higher education, establishing them as a fundamental pillar for the democratization of knowledge and the construction of more inclusive, participatory educational systems oriented toward global cooperation in intellectual production.

However, to overcome the challenges and maximize the impact of institutional repositories, institutions can adopt various strategies. First, implementing mandatory or incentivized open access policies promotes the systematic deposit of documents and data, ensuring that the institution's intellectual output is publicly available (Budapest Open Access Initiative, 2002).

The use of standardized metadata and interoperability protocols, such as OAI-PMH and Dublin Core schemes, allows documents to be easily located and integrated into national and international repositories, increasing the global visibility of research (Lynch, 2003). The adoption of open licenses, such as Creative Commons, facilitates the legal reuse of materials by researchers, teachers, and the general public, contributing to the circulation of knowledge and innovation (Suber, 2012).

It is also essential to offer researcher support services, including technical assistance for document deposit, advice on licenses and copyright, and guidance on how to increase the visibility of their work. Furthermore, training in information literacy and the development of skills for searching, evaluating, and using academic information enhance the effectiveness of repositories in democratizing knowledge (Borgman, 2015).

Finally, integration with disciplinary repositories and national and international aggregators strengthens the circulation of knowledge, allowing local research to have a global impact and enabling scientific production to be used in interdisciplinary and multicultural contexts (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021).

Institutional repositories represent a strategic infrastructure for the democratization of knowledge. By facilitating open access to articles, theses, data, and teaching materials, they increase the visibility of research, strengthen education, support innovation, and contribute to equity in the distribution of knowledge. However, their effectiveness depends on clear institutional policies, sustainable resources, a supportive academic culture, technological interoperability, and training and dissemination strategies. When these elements are combined, repositories not only expand access to knowledge but also foster the social appropriation of science, consolidating a more inclusive, equitable, and participatory academic ecosystem.

CONCLUSIONS

Institutional repositories are becoming a strategic pillar for the democratization of knowledge, providing an infrastructure that facilitates open access, digital preservation, and the equitable dissemination of academic knowledge. Their capacity to store, organize, and make publicly available the intellectual output of educational institutions helps to break down economic, geographic, and technological barriers, allowing students, faculty, researchers, and the general public to access resources that were previously restricted to closed publishing or institutional circles.

The analysis shows that these repositories not only improve the visibility, citation, and global reach of scientific output, but also strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration and promote a more transparent, open, and participatory academic culture. Furthermore, they play an essential role in preserving scientific memory, ensuring the continuity and long-term availability of documents and data, which is especially relevant for regional research or institutions with less international recognition.

However, their effectiveness depends on a combination of technical, cultural, and institutional factors. Financial sustainability, the quality of the technological infrastructure, metadata standardization, and compliance with open access policies are essential conditions for their proper functioning. Likewise, the willingness of academics to deposit their work, trust in the security and authenticity of the documents, and a user-centered design determine the degree of actual use and benefit derived from these systems. Without these conditions, repositories may remain underutilized and fail to reach their democratizing potential.

Institutional repositories are an essential tool for promoting equity in knowledge distribution and strengthening contemporary academic ecosystems. By integrating preservation, visibility, open access, and community participation, they contribute to transforming traditional scientific communication dynamics and expanding educational and research opportunities. Their consolidation, however, requires sustained institutional policies, technological investment, and an academic culture oriented toward openness, collaboration, and the social responsibility of knowledge.

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- manuscript drafting, critical content review, statistical analysis, and overall supervision of the study.

Conflicts of Interest:

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Author Contributions:

Sahand Mahdavi-Zargari: Conception and design of the study, data acquisition, analysis and interpretation,