

## Fostering Open Knowledge: OER and OA Developments at Bibliotheca Alexandrina by Hend El-Shennawy IFLA CPDWL Standing Committee Member

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Since its inauguration in 2002, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA) has positioned itself not only as a library but also as a cultural and knowledge hub, committed to democratizing access to information and supporting lifelong learning. A key part of this mission has been the development of Open Educational Resources (OER) and Open Access (OA) initiatives that promote free and inclusive access to knowledge for all.

At the BA, OER and OA initiatives are closely tied to the library's mission of knowledge dissemination, capacity building, and equitable access. From digitized collections and online courses to major digital repositories and international partnerships, the BA has become a pioneer in the Arab region in advancing open knowledge for local and global communities.

Building on this vision, the BA's approach to OER and OA is not only about providing access but also about fostering innovation, collaboration, and empowerment. By combining technological infrastructure with international best practices, the BA has created platforms that bridge cultural and linguistic gaps, while also supporting the professional development of educators, researchers, and information specialists. This integrated approach ensures that open resources are not merely repositories of content, but dynamic tools that advance education, research, and knowledge-sharing across disciplines and borders.

### **OER Development at the BA**

The BA has invested significantly in creating and sharing free educational content in Arabic, English and French serving diverse audiences; from students and researchers to lifelong learners. Its e-learning platforms and online repositories aim to reduce barriers to education and

encourage collaborative knowledge creation, aligning with UNESCO's global agenda for inclusive and accessible education.

Key OER-related initiatives include:

- Information for Africa (BAIFA) Programs:  
Open-access training programs that enhance information literacy and professional development, particularly for African library and information professionals.  
[BAIFA-Bibliotheca Alexandrina Information for Africa](#)
- Professional Development & Online Learning:  
Through workshops and online courses delivered via Moodle, the BA empowers researchers, librarians, and educators with the skills needed to create, use, and share open resources.  
[E-learning](#)
- Science Supercourse (with WHO):  
A library of over 100,000 scientific lectures on public health, computer engineering, and agriculture. This platform strengthens global health literacy and supports scientific education, particularly in underserved regions.  
[Library of Alexandria Scientific Supercourse](#)
- Heritage Documentary Short Movies – Aref (عارف):  
A series of short, freely available documentary films under the motto “Your Origin – Your Future” (أصلك – مستقبلك), offering engaging educational content.  
[الرئيسية - عارف](#)

## **OA Development at the BA**

The BA has also been at the forefront of Open Access initiatives, providing free and unrestricted access to a wealth of scholarly content, rare manuscripts, and archival materials. Its projects ensure that knowledge is not restricted by financial or geographical barriers.

Major OA projects include:

- Digital Assets Repository (DAR):  
An open-access platform archiving the library's digital collections, including

manuscripts, maps, photographs, audio, and video recordings. It serves as a massive repository of cultural and historical artifacts accessible worldwide.

[DAR](#)

- **Memory of Modern Egypt:**  
A comprehensive digital archive documenting Egypt's modern history from the 19th century to the present, including rare books, documents, films, and images.  
[ذاكرة مصر المعاصرة](#)
- **Arabic Manuscripts Digital Library:**  
Thousands of manuscripts on medicine, astronomy, philosophy, and literature have been digitized and preserved, ensuring access for scholars and promoting intercultural exchange.
- **Egyptian Press Archive (with CEDEJ):**  
Over 1.7 million press clippings from 300 newspapers (1950s–2017) have been digitized and indexed, offering researchers invaluable insights into Egypt's political, cultural, and economic life.  
<https://cedej.bibalex.org/>
- **Internet Archive Partnership:**  
As a regional hub, the BA serves as a physical backup for the Internet Archive, preserving billions of webpages, texts, audios, and videos, thus safeguarding the digital memory of humanity.  
[Internet Archive: Digital Library of Free & Borrowable Texts, Movies, Music & Wayback Machine](#)  
[International School of Information Science \(ISIS\)](#)
- **Wikimedia Partnership:**  
Training local volunteers to contribute to Wikipedia, expanding the availability of reliable knowledge in Arabic and other languages.
- **Digitizing the Legacy of the Ancient Library:**  
Digitization of texts, maps, and historical documents relating to ancient Alexandria and Hellenistic civilization, bridging ancient heritage with modern research.  
[Digital Library, The Alexandria Center for Hellenistic Studies, Bibliotheca Alexandrina](#)

### **The Transformative Impact of Open Resources:**

The significance of these initiatives lies in their direct impact on widening access to reliable, high-quality information. They enable students to pursue independent learning, researchers to access unique historical and scholarly sources, and educators to enrich their teaching with open materials. Moreover, by digitizing rare collections and creating multilingual educational content, the BA ensures that cultural heritage and scholarly knowledge are preserved for future generations while remaining accessible to today's global audience. In this way, OER and OA development at the BA play a transformative role in spreading knowledge, promoting equity, and nurturing an informed and engaged society.

## **Conclusion**

The Bibliotheca Alexandrina demonstrates how libraries can act as leaders in open knowledge, inclusion, and cultural preservation. By digitizing heritage, supporting OER platforms, and engaging with global partners such as WHO, Wikimedia, and the Internet Archive, the BA has established itself as a regional and global pioneer in OER and OA development.

Looking ahead, the BA hopes that its OER and OA initiatives will continue to serve as a valuable resource for scholars, educators, and library users worldwide. More importantly, the BA aspires to inspire other libraries and cultural institutions to adopt similar projects, fostering a shared commitment to open knowledge and inclusive access. In an age where information is both a right and a necessity, such collective efforts can shape a more connected, educated, and enlightened global community.