Open Access: Perceptions and Reactions of Academic Librarians in Nigerian Private Universities

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Abstract

Open Access (OA) has been heralded as a key strategy for promoting the electronic dissemination and access to quality scientific knowledge by researchers in developing countries. The objective of this paper is to evaluate the perceptions and reactions of academic librarians in Nigerian private universities to OA publishing as a medium for disseminating quality scientific knowledge and for assessing the contributions of scholars to global knowledge improvements. Ten of the seventeen private universities in Southwestern Nigeria were randomly selected, and 42 academic librarians from the ten universities were surveyed. A questionnaire adapted from Palmer, et al. (2009) was used to collect data. The findings showed that academic librarians in Nigerian private universities have positive perception of OA scholarly publishing. However, their level of involvement in creating awareness and contributing to the development of OA at the time of the study was low. It needs to be improved in view of the potential benefit of OA for promoting the visibility of the research output of researchers in the universities.

Introduction

Scholarly publishing has created a lot of challenges for stakeholders since its evolution in the mid 17th Century. This is the reason why stakeholders have continuously developed scholarly publishing models meant to guarantee that scholarly publishing maintains its quality. This quality assurance is meant to ensure that scholarly publishing maintains its value as a source of global knowledge and a means to assess the contributions of scholars to global knowledge development. Consequently, the evolution of scholarly publishing from personal letters and idea-notes shared by scholars among themselves to bulky, periodically published and paper-based journals, and of recent to electronic journals, is a practical example of ways stakeholders have transformed and tried to maintain scholarly publishing quality. The number of stakeholders involved in scholarly publishing has therefore increased beyond scholars who shared scholarly letters and idea-notes within a locality. It now includes an array of scholars who serve as authors, peer reviewers and editors, academic and research institutions, librarians, and publishers. Scholarly publishing stakeholders also include organisations and individuals that work for commercial publishers as agents and middle-men. Governments and agencies that legislate on intellectual property and copyright may also be included as scholarly publishing stakeholders.

These evolving scenarios have led to the increase in the number of studies focused on the various roles different stakeholder groups play in the publishing chain. For instance, studies have been carried out on the serials crises and their effects on stakeholders. Studies by Bosch (2005), Liu (2003) and Cox (1998) were conducted to elicit the effects of serials crisis on the finances of

academic institutions and libraries and the gains commercial publishers derive from the crisis. Morris (2004) outlined how libraries' prestige had dwindled because of their inability to provide expectant users with the array of scholarly information they need due to decreases in their acquisitions budget and the high prices charged by commercial publishers.

There are also studies in the literature on business models and economics of scholarly publishing, especially as it concerns the comparison of the economic model adopted by professional and commercial publishers and open access publishers (SQL 2004; Willinsky, 2009; Conlley and Wooders, 2009). Some studies have also looked at the challenge of archiving open access articles which are normally in digital forms and are believed to be lacking the kind of archival quality possessed by articles published in paper form (Moghaddam, 2007). Other studies, like that of Crawford (2003), down-played the fact that the open access scholarly publishing model was more economical than the commercial scholarly publishing model on the ground that research value should be assessed on what users are willing to pay to access it, and not by its ease of access.

Similarly, the evolution of the open access publishing model has been reported to have diverse effects on stakeholders. For example, research-based institutions have been advised to transfer the money they pay for scholarly publishing subscriptions to support open access initiatives by paying the publication fees of authors from their institutions (Gass, 2005). Libraries, on the other hand, have found open access as good alternatives to or complements of subscription based scholarly publications. Scholars, on the other hand, also have to accommodate the two sides of a coin, which are the free access they have to their peers' scholarly works and the visibility their own works enjoy on one side, and the economic implications of paying publication fees (Regazzi, 2004; Bjork and Oorni, 2009). They also have to grapple with the issue of prestige and reward, as academic institutions still find it difficult to accord research that appears in open access outlets the same kind of prestige and credit in promotion and continuing status reviews that they accord research in paper-based journals (Bosch, 2005). Another factor is the extent of scholars' awareness of, and willingness to use open access publishing outlets (Nicholas and Rowlands, 2005; Utulu and Bolarinwa, 2009). Despite these challenges, there is a growing recognition by academic libraries in Africa that open access is an economically viable alternative that would help provide access to global research and knowledge (Nwagwu, 2005; Christian, 2005).

Over the years therefore, research on open access has been channelled towards understanding how various stakeholders perceive and react to its evolution, and a large portion of the research has focused on academic institutions, publishers and scholars. It is however, unfortunate that studies concerning how librarians are reacting to open access publishing are sparse. The study by Palmer et al. (2009) is however a significant effort geared towards understanding how librarians are reacting to the evolution of open access publishing. The present study follows in the steps of that study, and is thus carried out to understand how academic librarians in private universities in Southwestern Nigeria perceive and are reacting to the open access initiative. Admittedly, this study did not attempt to collate and present a complete Nigerian situation report, as it focused only on the academic librarians in Nigerian private universities. However, it was hoped that, based on the number of private universities in Southwestern Nigeria, the study could provide a picture of the situation at least in respect of academic librarians in private universities in Nigeria.

Research on Open Access (OA)

The literature is replete with many reported studies on open access (OA) publishing most of which attempted to provide definitions for the term. Although there have been slight disagreement among scholars on the definition of OA publishing, scholars are beginning to agree

on a definition relying on the following three concepts: free access, online based and absence of copyright restrictions, as emphasised in the Budapest, Bethesda and Berlin declarations. Hence, according to Palmer et al. (2009), open access is "scholarship that is available online free of charge."

There have been research efforts regarding OA publishing models, and their economics, impact and quality as means of disseminating scientific knowledge and assessing the contributions to knowledge of scholars and researchers. Attempts have been made in the literature by proponents of OA publishing using yardsticks such as those that were used by Bjork and Oorna (2009) to justify how scholarly journals can serve as service providers to authors. Efforts have also been made to justify OA in the light of Liu's (2003) proposition on how scholarly journals are transforming to accommodate interdisciplinary discourses and the volumes of research contents that scholars produce. Fytte and Schlenburger (2002) have confirmed that OA publishing is able to provide authors with required services like the provision of infrastructure, readership, high prestige and high performance qualitative review processes. Studies have also been carried out regarding how OA publishing is able to manage copyright (Suber, 2004; Kawooya, 2008). There are also studies that looked at the practical applications of the OA publishing principles and practices, and their contributions to the development of scholarship (Regazzi, 2004; Fitzpatrick, 2001).

Major contributions from Africa on scholarly publishing are sparse and are mostly limited to issues concerning the effects of the serials crisis on scholarly publishing in the continent. The effects of Africa's dwindling economy on Africa's contributions to global scholarship and knowledge have also been assessed (Altbach and Tefera, 1998). Other areas that have been covered by African scholars regarding scholarly publishing are bibliometric and citation analyses which are primarily meant to assess the structure of Africa's use of scholarly publications (Adeniran, 1988; Bikai-Nyunai, 2006a, 2006b). From another perspective, Nwakanma (2003) investigated where Nigerian library and information science (LIS) scholars published their scholarly works. The study's objective was to assess Nigerian LIS authors' quest for visibility through publishing their research output in readily available journals, and often without adequate consideration of the relevance of the output to the communities where the journals are circulated. Some authors have carried out empirical studies in areas relating to the evolution of electronic scholarly publishing systems for Africa, a successful example among which is the African Journal Online (Rosenberg, 2003; Cumming, 2006). An increasing number of studies have looked at the benefits of OA to Africa and the challenges Africans are facing in their quest to adopt it (Utulu and Bolarinwa, 2009; Christian, 2008; Nwagwu, 2005). Other studies have focused on levels of acceptance of OA by academics and the effects of socio-technical factors such as the digital divide on its adoption. However, empirical studies that compare the cost of paper-based journal publications with OA journals especially as it relates with economic situations in Africa are still being awaited.

Methodology

A questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument in the study. The questionnaire, which is a modified version of the questionnaire used by Palmer et al. (2009), was administered on 55 academic librarians in 10 private universities selected randomly from the 17 private universities in Southwestern Nigeria. The 10 universities comprise 62.5 % of the total number of private universities in the region and 41.5 % of the total number (41) of private universities in Nigeria, as at the time of the study. The questionnaire copies were distributed by hand and by postal service to the academic librarians in their institutions between September 2009 and March 2010. The overall questionnaire return rate was 76.4 per cent, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution and Returns by University

S/N	University	Year established	Questionnaire copies distributed	Questionnaire copies returned	Return rate %	Percentage of total sample
1	Babcock University	1999	15	7	46.7	15.9
2	Lead City University	2002	9	7	77.8	15.9
3	Redeemer's University	2005	9	9	100.0	20.5
4	Crescent University	2005	3	2	66.6	4.5
5	Bells University of Technology	2005	5	5	100.0	11.9
6	Crawford University	2005	5	3	60.0	7.1
7	Joseph Ayoola Babalola University	2006	3	3	100.0	6.9
8	Fountain University	2007	2	2	100.0	4.5
9	Caleb University	2007	2	2	100.0	4.5
10	Achievers University	2007	2	2	100.0	4.5
	Total		**55**	**42**	**76.4**	**100.0**

Findings

Of the 42 academic librarians who participated in the study, 23 (54.8 %) were male, while 19 (45.2 %) were female. Also, only 2 (4.8 %) of the universities where the academic librarians were employed offered courses at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels while only one (2.4 %) offered courses at the diploma and undergraduate levels and 39 (95.2 %) offered courses at the undergraduate level only.

Table 2 shows that most of the respondents had been involved with multiple assignments in the libraries. Interestingly, the highest proportion of the academic librarians was involved in assignments that had to do with user access facilitation services – circulation, reference and public services, etc. Also, high percentages of them were involved in acquisitions and administration duties, and the maintenance of electronic systems such as digital library, library system and networks, and web services.

Table 2: Distribution of the Academic Librarians by Official assignment

S/N	Official function	Number	Percentage
1	Circulation/Access /Public /Reference Services	23	76.7
2	Acquisition and Collection Management	19	63.3
3	Administration	18	60.3
4	Digital Library/System Network/Web Development	16	53.3
5	Cataloguing/Metadata	15	50.0
6	Archives/Government Documents/ Special Collection	11	36.6
7	Audiovisual/Media Services	9	30.0

8	Instructional Services	7	23.3
9	Interlibrary Loan	6	20.0
10	Subject Specialist	4	13.3
11	Development/Fundraising	3	10.0

Table 3 shows that the academic librarians' perceptions of issues such as taking actions to shape the future of scholarly publications, active involvement of librarians in the success of OA, development of quality measurement tools and provision of financial support through increased professional engagement with OA were very positive.

Table 3: Perceptions of Roles of Academic Libraries in shaping the Future of Scholarly Publishing

Perception Factors	SD		D		NS		A		SA		No Response	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
AL should take actions to shape the future of scholarly publishing	3	7.1	-	-	-	-	9	21.4	27	64.3	3	7.1
OA will fail without the active involvement of academic librarians	3	7.1	3	7.1	6	14.3	14	33.3	15	35.7	1	2.4
The Principles of OA relate to the purpose of AL	1	2.4	1	2.4	6	14.3	17	40.5	13	31.0	4	9.5
Involvement in OA is one way for AL to stay relevant in the changing information landscape	3	7.1	1	2.4	2	4.8	19	45.2	17	40.5	-	-
AL should help develop impact measurement tools for OA journals	2	4.8	-	-	-	-	19	45.2	20	47.6	1	2.4
Providing financial resources to support OA should be a priority of AL	2	4.8	2	4.8	-	-	17	40.5	19	45.2	-	-
AL should reallocate existing resources	1	2.4	-	-	2	4.8	23	54.8	16	38.1	-	-

Note: AL= Academic Libraries; OA= Open Access

The respondents also agreed that academic librarians should educate faculty and campus administration on copyright issues, submission of pre-prints to their university libraries and the publishing of their papers in OA outlets (Table 4). They also agreed that academic librarians should perform leadership roles in educating university administration in accepting OA publications for all academic rewards.

Table 4: Academic Librarians' Perception of their Roles in Promoting OA in University Communities

Perception Factors	SD		D		NS		A		SA		No Response	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%

	SD		D		NS		A		SA		No Response	
AL Should educate faculty about OA	1	2.4	-	-	2	4.8	23	54.8	16	38.1	-	-	
AL should educate campus administration about OA	-	-	2	4.8	5	11.9	28	66.7	7	16.7	-	-	
AL should educate faculty about copyright issues related to their publications	2	4.8	2	4.8	10	23.8	22	52.4	6	14.3	-	-	
AL should encourage faculty to submit pre-published versions of their research to OA journals	2	4.8	1	2.4	11	26.2	15	35.7	13	31.0	-	-	
AL should encourage faculty to publish their research in OA peer-reviewed journals	1	2.4	2	4.8	23	54.8	15	35.7	15	35.7	1	2.4	
AL should encourage faculty to deposit scholarly work that they do not intend to publish into OA repositories	1	2.4	-	-	-	-	21	50.0	19	45.2	1	2.4	
AL should encourage campus administration to adopt tenure and promotion policies that support the growth of OA	2	4.8	-	-	8	19.0	16	38.1	15	35.7	1	2.4	

Note: AL= Academic Libraries; OA= Open Access

As summarised in table 5, the respondents' perceptions of the role academic libraries should play in creating access OA resources is positive. In fact, 73.8 % of the respondents agreed that academic libraries should create links to OA resources in their websites while 92.9% agreed that academic libraries should include bibliographic records for OA journals in their catalogues.

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents' Perception of their Roles in Creating Access OA Resources

Perception Factors	*SD*		*D*		*NS*		*A*		*SA*		*No Response*	
	No.	*%*	*No.*	*%*	*No.*	*%*	*No.*	*%*	*No.*	*%*	*No.*	*%*
AL should include bibliographic records for OA journals in their catalogues	1	2.4	-	-	2	4.8	21	50.0	18	42.9	-	-
AL websites should include links to OA journals	-	-	3	7.1	7	16.7	20	47.6	11	26.2	1	2.4
AL should create	2	4.8	4	9.5	4	9.5	18	42.9	14	33.3	-	-

professional positions whose main duties concern OA												

Note: AL= Academic Libraries; OA= Open Access

Table 6 shows further that the respondents had positive perception of issues concerning repository management in universities, replacement of expensive subscription-based journals with high quality OA journals and giving subscription preference to subscription-based journals that allow authors to retain copyright in their works.

Table 6: Distribution of Respondents' Perception of their Roles in Supporting and Promoting Policies Meant to Regulate OA

Perception Factors	SD		D		NS		A		SA		No Response	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
AL are the best suited to manage campuses' OA repositories	1	2.4	3	7.1	10	23.8	16	38.1	11	26.2	1	2.4
AL should replace exorbitantly priced journals with comparable OA journals when available	2	4.8	4	9.5	6	14.3	20	47.6	9	21.4	1	2.4
AL should give subscription preference to journal publishers who allow authors to retain copyright	-	-	2	4.8	12	28.6	19	45.2	8	19.0	1	2.4

Note: AL= Academic Libraries; OA= Open Access

Finally, table 7 reveals that the respondents' reactions to issues regarding the popularisation of OA were however not forceful enough. The data in the table show that the OA popularisation actions taken by the majority of the respondents were only occasional and reactive, instead of being proactive.

Table 7: Distribution of Respondents' Frequency of Engagement in Educating Members of the University Communities about OA

Perception Factors	Never		Occasionally		Always	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
On average I read literature that discusses OA	3	7.1	27	64.3	12	28.6
On average I discuss OA with librarians at the campuses outside my own	12	28.6	24	57.1	6	14.3
On average I discuss OA with librarians at my campus	7	16.7	20	47.6	15	35.7
On average I discuss OA with non-librarians at my campus	12	28.6	16	38.1	13	31.0
On average I discuss OA with non-librarians at campuses outside my own	18	42.9	19	45.2	5	11.9
On average I discuss OA administration at my library	8	19.0	22	52.4	12	28.6

On average I discuss OA with non library administrators at my campus	18	42.9	17	40.5	7	16.7

Note: AL= Academic Libraries; OA= Open Access

Discussion

OA access has become a dynamic tool or, better still, a publishing model used for diverse academic information management reasons. Most adopters of OA are now using it as a medium for online journal publishing, for online repositories that can provide access to research, and as medium of preserving and providing access to educational resources such as reports, guides, manuals, etc (Xia, 2008; Xia and Opperman, 2010; Utulu 2010).

Noteworthy is the fact that 92.9 % of the Nigerian private universities that were studied provide only undergraduate programmes, which means that their interest in OA would not be primarily for disseminating research. Undergraduate programmes usually require only basic information resources for undergraduate teaching and learning, and this may limit perceptions and adoption of OA solutions in these private universities. Thus, the official assignments of the academic librarians who participated in the study might have accounted for why most of them had positive perceptions of OA initiatives. Although their individual assignments seem diverse, the majority of the academic librarians indicated that they were involved in circulation, access creation, public services and reference services. Thus, they are likely to see opportunities to use worldwide OA resources to overcome the challenges of providing adequate information resources to academic staff and students in their universities, and not really creating their own OA resources. The librarians are therefore likely to have positive perceptions of the importance of OA initiative and the role they would want to play in popularizing the initiative.

The study found out that a significant percentage of academic librarians in Nigerian private universities believed that they should be involved in shaping the future of scholarly publishing and that their active involvement in OA initiative development will help develop and sustain the initiative. In fact, 92.9 % of them agreed that academic librarians should include OA sources in their bibliographies, 73.8 % agreed that they should create links on their websites to OA journals, while 76.2 % agreed that it is important to establish a professional position whose official duties would be mainly the management of OA sources and services. They also are of the opinion that OA initiative is in alignment with the principles and practices of academic librarianship and, therefore, that they should be involved in developing tools to assess their quality and also give financial support to the initiative.

This study found out that academic librarians in Nigerian private universities are willing to start off programmes to contribute to the measurement of the quality of OA resources. This may have arisen because of the frequent criticisms of the quality of OA resources in the literature. Apart from developing quality measurement parameters, 69 %, of the sampled librarians agreed to replacing expensive journals with comparable OA journals and patronising journal publishers who allow authors to retain copyright as ways to support the OA initiative financially. Hence, monies used for subscribing to journals can be used to pay authors' fees normally charged by OA outlets to cover publication costs. It is however doubtful that any of the private universities studied have plans or plans in the offing that may allow them pay authors' fees for their academic staff who are interested in publishing in OA journals. Moreover, the acquisition of journals and other academic materials in academic libraries involves a lot of procedures and stakeholders. Hence, these suggestions would require the involvement and approval of academic staff who desire quality information resources and university administrators who make final funding decisions on acquisitions to be made by their university libraries. To replace already known, but expensive paper-based scholarly resources with little known OA resources will need the input of a wide range of stakeholders in a university setup. This underscores the crucial roles that

academic librarians need to play to educate and lobby the various stakeholders (management, academic staff and students).

Unfortunately, the study also found out that the academic librarians' reactions to or participation in activities that are required to bring their perceptions into fruition was not encouraging. As shown in table 7, the libraries mostly either never or only occasionally performed all the seven practical activities and measures that would have helped them to promote OA initiatives, policies and programmes in their universities. For instance, the activity of reading the literature to improve their understanding OA initiatives, which Utulu (2010) considered very essential to planning and executing OA projects, was reportedly done by the librarians only occasionally. Other actions such as discussing OA with fellow librarians within and outside their universities, and with university administrators were also done occasionally.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that academic librarians in Nigerian private universities had positive perception of the importance of the OA initiative to the development of scholarship, especially in regard to facilitating access to a wide range of academic information resources. However, they did not show adequate support for the popularisation of OA through learning more about, influencing the development of policies, or promoting and educating stakeholders on the importance of OA to scholarship in Nigerian private universities. With these kinds of reactions, the adoption of OA by Nigerian private universities might not be as fast as one might have imagined.

But even then, beyond the private universities, many public universities in Nigeria have not been making the required fast progress in implementing OA projects, and this is despite the fact that some of them have been in existence for decades apart from receiving annual government subventions that private universities do not get. At present, only one of the more than sixty public universities in Nigerian has an institutional repository (www.opendoar.org/countrylist.php#nigeria). This is an indication that Nigerian universities are still far from actualising their dreams of joining the league of universities harnessing the benefits of OA resources from the demand, as well as the supply sides. This is not encouraging when compared to other developing countries like South Africa and Egypt that have seized the opportunities that OA initiatives offer.

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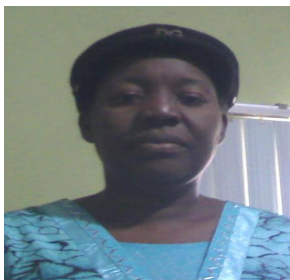
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