**Open Access awareness and advocacy for Researchers**

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**Abstract**

The prevalent notion of physical space coexistence rather than virtual knowledge exchange in African is becoming outdated thus there is a call for action to support unrestricted access to information and knowledge dissemination. Open access has transformed modern research, enabling widespread knowledge dissemination and fostering innovation. Yet some are unaware of its practices and benefits. This paper presents report on open access awareness project conducted at Summit University, Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria. The project aimed to democratize open access culture among researchers, develop and validate an institutional open access policy and a public online repository to curate institutional research. Using a mixed method approach combining workshop and survey, over 70 researchers participated in the event held on 3rd of February, 2024. Key findings revealed that 20. 8 % of the participants were unaware of open access before attending the event. Gaining insight on open access practices was rated high as the goal of attending the workshop by 48% of the participants. Among the themes under Open access practices, the Open access publishing was rated highest as the aspect to gain insight on with 63.6%. Thus, showing that participants will like to know more about the open access publishing. Finding further revealed institutional support and cost of publishing was rated high as a barrier to adopting open access, post-event. The research team acknowledges the generous support of the funder, Open Research Funders Group (ORFG). Their support was instrumental in the successful implementation of the awareness and advocacy program on open access.

Keywords: Awareness and advocacy, Knowledge Dissemination, Open Access

**Introduction**

The world has transformed to a knowledge based society and knowledge is considered the most critical means of production. Similarly, higher educational institutions through their research are source of knowledge input, production and exchange in knowledge society. These knowledge and research are disseminated to the community for further use.

Traditionally, access to research findings and scholarly publications has been restricted by subscription-based journals and proprietary databases, limiting the reach and impact of knowledge. However with the advent of digital technologies and the internet, open access has emerged as a transformative practice promoting free and unrestricted access to knowledge.

Open access has transformed modern research, teaching and learning enabling widespread knowledge dissemination and fostering innovation. Yet some are unaware of its practices and benefits. The use of open access has offered researchers extensive visibility and usage of research findings among diverse audience. On 3rd of February, 2024, Summit University, Offa in collaboration with Federal University of Technology, Minna hosted an Open Access Awareness and Advocacy Event, bringing together researchers and stakeholders to promote the benefits and values of open access in research and development. The event aimed to democratize open access knowledge, promote the adoption of open access practices, and advocate for policies and strategies that support open access publishing in Summit University, Offa Kwara State Nigeria. The event featured survey, keynote presentations, panel discussions and interactive sessions, providing a platform for participants to share experiences, challenges and best practices in open access. This report highlights the key outcomes, discussions, and recommendations from the event, stressing the collective efforts towards advancing Open access in Nigeria.

**Literature Review**

Open access is a set of practices through which research outputs are distributed free of cost and other access barriers in an online environment. It is a component of Open Science thatincludes a variety of efforts towards making scientific research more transparent and accessible. Similarly, open Access publishing is a form of open access in which a publisher makes all articles and related content associated with a certain journal available for free on the journal's website. Open Access scholarly publishing offers free access and wide dissemination for research findings as an additional value for scholarly content. Despite the potentials of open access publishing, its adoption and use is still low. Bashorun et al (2016) carried out a research on determinants of adoption and use of Open Access Publishing by Academic Staff in Nigeria Universities, using an adapted Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use Technology (UTAUT). The study revealed that due to lack of open access policy, most of the respondents did not know about open access publishing. It also shows that awareness, attitude, performance expectancy, Internet self-efficacy and facilitating conditions significantly influenced the adoption and use of open access publishing. One of the implications of this study is that there is a need for adequate facilities to support adoption and use of open access publishing.

Ezema and Ejikeme (2019) examined the state of open access institutional repositories in Nigeria using infometrics to extract data from two major repositories and expository review of literature to x-ray the state of art. Findings revealed that Nigeria has twenty repositories from 14 out of about 153 universities in the country; majority of the repositories (70%) use DSpace as archiving software. The dominant contents of the repositories are journal articles, theses, and dissertations. While the study exposes the weaknesses of Nigeria universities in exploring the potentials of institutional repositories in wider dissemination of scientific productivity, it challenges government and other stakeholders to develop sustainable framework for development of repositories in the country.

Open Access Repositories are viewed as a new channel of scholarly communication and a way for scholars to disseminate their work faster to a broader audience. Tmava (2023) in a study to provide an understanding of the psychology of the faculty reluctance towards their participation in open access repositories revealed that while close to half of the faculty support the open access principles and are willing to share their work in open access, a little over half of faculty seem to be unfamiliar with the open access goals and the purpose of repositories. In addition, faculty comments reveal a wide range of perceived concerns regarding open access repositories, from submission process, plagiarism, and copyright concerns to the perception of open access publishing as low-quality publishing route that can have a negative impact on their academic careers. Thus, to better address faculty needs and concerns, it is crucial to take a multifaceted approach, targeting each concern independently.

Open access is particularly considered beneficial to researchers in the global south. However, voice from global north has largely dominated the research into awareness and attitudes to adopting open. Nobes and Harris (2023) conducted a survey on 507 researchers from the developing world and connected to INASP's AuthorAID project to ascertain experiences and attitudes to open access publishing. The survey revealed there was a very positive attitude to open access research and open access journals. However, when selecting a journal in which to publish open access was seen as a much less important criterion than factors relating to international reputation. Overall, a majority of respondents had published in an OA journal and most of these had paid an article processing charge. Knowledge and use of self-archiving via repositories varied, and only around 20% had deposited their research in an institutional repository.

Peekhaus (2021) presented the results from a survey of faculty in North American Library and Information Studies schools about their attitudes towards and experience with open-access publishing. It is a follow-up to a similar survey conducted in 2013, the article outlines the differences in beliefs about and engagement with open access that have occurred between 2013 and 2018. Engagement with open access has increased significantly, while perceptions of open access have remained relatively stable between 2013 and 2018. Nonetheless, those faculties who have published in an open-access journal or are more knowledgeable about open access tend to be more convinced about the quality of open-access publications and less apprehensive about open-access publishing than those who have no publishing experience with open-access journals or who are less knowledgeable about various open-access modalities. Willingness to comply with gold open-access mandates has increased significantly since 2013.

**Methodology**

The open access for research and development project employed a survey research design to assess the current knowledge and perception of participants on open access. A pre and post event survey was conducted using an online questionnaire, administered to all participants before and after the webinar. The questionnaire consisted of multiple-choice, Likert scale, and open-ended questions. The questions covered; Demographic information, Awareness on open access and its benefits, Awareness on open access practices Perceived barriers to adopting open access practices. The questionnaire was administered online and participants were invited to complete the survey via a link provided in the webinar registration flyer. The pre-webinar survey was conducted two weeks before the webinar, and the post-webinar survey was conducted immediately after the webinar.

**Results**

Finding from the awareness and advocacy revealed, 29.9% of the participants were PhD holders, 42.9% with MSc., 22.1% with BSc., while HND, ND were least of the participants qualification.

Pre-event survey revealed participants level of awareness on open access with 11.7% of the participants not aware of open access and 9.1% have no idea on open access. However, post-event revealed 0% of the participants are unaware of open access post-event.

Rating the participant’s current knowledge on open-access pre-event, 13% of the participant rated their knowledge on open access low and 10.4% have no knowledge on it. While post event revealed 0% of the participant have no knowledge on open-access.

Pre-event, 68.8% of the participants were hoping to gain more insight on Open Access Publishing while 70% of the participants were able to gain insight on aspect of open access publishing post-event

Pre-event, improving their research visibility was rated highest with 74% of the participants as the primary goals of attending the workshop, while the participants goal achieved after the event changed from improving their research visibility to enhanced collaboration opportunity with 70% of the participants

33.3% of the participants perceive institutional support as barrier to adopting open access practices in their field while 33.3% rated cost of Publishing as a barrier. Perceived journal quality, discipline norms around publishing in high index journal and perceived Intellectual Property concern are rated 11.1% respectively as barriers to adopting open access.

On the important of open access to progress of research and development 98% of the participants rated open access very important while 1.3% rated it not important.

**Discussion of findings**

The percentage of participants with higher degree (PhD and MSc) indicated the workshop attracted researchers who are already engaged and likely to influence their publication decision. . There is significant increase in awareness and knowledge about open access among the participants, this is in line with Bashorun et al (2016) emphasizing the importance of educational intervention in promoting open access. Knowledge and awareness are crucial for adopting open access practices and can effectively bridge the gap and misconceptions about open access. Advocate can leverage this evidence to promote similar programmes in other institutions.

The shift in participants primary goal from improving research productivity to enhancing collaboration opportunities post event indicates a broader understanding of the benefits of open access on the development of research.

However, the barriers to adopting open access reflect the on-going challenges in literature. Participant identified institutional support, cost of publishing and concern for quality as barriers to adopting open access.

**Conclusion**

From the finding it can be concluded that, more participants are aware of open access and its importance. However, participants still have challenges on guiding principle of open access and adopting.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made

1. Effectively tailored educational programmes should be conducted regularly to promote the adoption of open access publishing.
2. Developing institutional repositories will address the institutional support barriers
3. Researchers who has benefited from open access publishing should share their stories to encourage others
4. Academic institutions should develop and implement open access policies and mandate repositories deposit.
5. Establishing mentorship programmes where open access advocates guides and support their peers to adopt and support open access
6. Researchers should be educated to identify reputable journal and avoid predatory publishers.

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