

Research Application Summary

Africa for Africa's knowledge economy via open access publishing: Towards development of African citation indices

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Abstract

Africa contributes dismally to global open access publishing, yet has fallen victim to external publishing. Most open access journals in Africa are classified as predatory, thus leading to querying the strength of papers published therein. In fact, many of the journals which publishers classify as potential, possible or predatory have been in existence for decades before the emergence of OA publishing system. The ‘pay, publish and yet perish’ syndrome may reflect on international reputation of academic standard in the continent. Journals that few years ago were used by authors to accelerate academic ladder to the peak are today termed predatory and rejected by some universities. The paper examined the new trend of increasing the requirement in the quality/reputation of academic journals required for promotion of academic staff; the results and implications and the ways forward to limit industrial actions and promote Africa’s knowledge economy via open access. The issues discussed include low international reputation, inter university migration, frustration and conflict, disparate academic standard, capacity building in human and resource base, appropriate funding, rewards and dividends of publications, African journals standardization and indigenization policy to develop African indexing system, regular check and monitoring, proper view and use of other publication outlets. The paper is of the view that by Africa embracing some worth of standardization and indigenization as used in certain continents and countries, she can standardize the educational systems on the continent and improve the international academic reputation of African Universities as well as counteract the ‘pay, publish and yet perish’ syndrome.

Key words: Agricultural sciences, indexing systems, journals, standardization

Résumé

L’Afrique contribue très peu à la publication en libre accès dans le monde, mais elle est victime de la publication externe. La plupart des revues en libre accès en Afrique sont classées comme potentiellement prédatrices, ce qui conduit à s’interroger sur la force des articles qui y sont publiés. En fait, nombre de revues que les éditeurs classent comme potentielles revues prédatrices ou revues prédatrices existaient déjà depuis des décennies avant l’émergence du système de publication en libre accès. Le syndrome “payer, publier et pourtant périr” peut avoir des répercussions sur la réputation internationale des normes universitaires sur le continent. Les revues qui, il y a quelques années, étaient utilisées par les auteurs pour accélérer la promotion académique sont aujourd’hui qualifiées de prédatrices et rejetées par certaines universités. L’article examine la nouvelle tendance à l’augmentation des exigences de qualité/réputation des revues académiques requises pour la promotion du personnel académique ; les résultats et implications

et les moyens à mettre en œuvre pour limiter les actions industrielles et promouvoir l'économie de la connaissance en Afrique à travers les publication en libre accès. Les questions abordées comprennent la faible réputation internationale, la migration interuniversitaire, la frustration et les conflits, la disparité des normes universitaires, le renforcement des capacités en matière de ressources humaines et autres, le financement approprié, les récompenses et les dividendes des publications, la normalisation des revues africaines et la politique d'indigénisation pour développer un système d'indexation africain, le contrôle et la surveillance réguliers, la vision et l'utilisation appropriées des autres points de publication. L'article estime qu'en adoptant une certaine valeur de normalisation et d'indigénisation comme celle utilisée sur certains continents et dans certains pays, l'Afrique peut normaliser les systèmes éducatifs sur le continent et améliorer la réputation académique internationale des universités africaines, et lutter contre le syndrome "payer, publier et pourtant périr".

Mots clés : Sciences agricoles, systèmes d'indexation, revues, normalisation

Introduction

Africa has generally contributed very little to global open access publishing but suffers the most negative impact of its externality. For instance only 6% to the 10152 journals listed in Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) as at 2014 originated from Africa, and only 20 of Africa's 56 countries have journals that were listed in the database (Beall, 2015). Although the statistics keep on changing, the implications to African knowledge economy remain the same. It includes poor institution rating and wastage of resources among others. Open access can be defined as the 'practice of providing on-line access to scientific information that is free of charge to the end-user and that is re-usable. In the context of research and innovation, 'scientific information' can refer to (i) peer-reviewed scientific research articles (published in scholarly journals) or (ii) research data (data underlying publications, curated data and/or raw data)' (EUC, 2013).

EUC (2013) also maintained that Open access to scientific publications refers to free of charge online access for any user. Legally binding definitions of 'open access' and 'access' in this context do not exist, but authoritative definitions of open access can be found in key political declarations on this subject. These definitions describe 'access' in the context of open access as including not only basic elements such as the right to read, download and print, but also the right to copy, distribute, search, link, crawl, and mine.

The value, validity and viability of Open Access (OA) journals have remained controversy or prominent topics of debate in the library and publishing communities. It is over a decade since Thomson Scientific information first studied the citation impact of OA journals using the 2002 Journal Citation Reports (McVeigh, (2004)). Comparison of OA journals with Thomson Scientific information involves a lot of work that shows differences in value or impact of the journals. The preliminary step of the work was fixing the list of Open Access journals tracked by Thomson Reuters in Journal citation Reports (JCR). JCR was compared to the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) as of 31 December of the corresponding year. And low citation has characterised OA when compeered with Thomson Reuters (Giglia, 2010).

With respect to potential, possible, or probable predatory scholarly open-access publishers, the year, 2015, marked the fifth annual release of this list, which is also continuously updated. The list for 2015 includes 693 publishers which represent 216 increases over the 2014 list. The results of stand-alone journals in 2015, marks the third annual release of this list, which is also continuously updated. The list for year 2015 includes 507 journals, an increase of 204 over 2014 (Beall, 2015).

Although Africa has contributed very little to open access publishing, African scholars are the highest exploited by the unscrupulous publishers of the OA journals. Many of the journals have existed before the sudden classification, thus making it difficult to identify journals that are actually predatory. Many of the OA journals have caused a lot of confusion and trouble to the academic communities in Nigeria from the view point of administration and international reputation. From individual perspective, they have drained the income of some academic staff that see the pay and publish option as way to bank journals to their credit. Such desperate authors are exploited by unscrupulous publishers who took undue advantage of some of the facilities provided by open access publishing system.

Many of the journals classified as predatory have existed for decades while the new journals are classified as questionable by Jeffrey Beall reports. This implies that Beall's classification may not have reflected the real situations of publishers in developing countries or what is required for publishers in developing countries to sanitize journal publishing.

This paper seeks to address the following questions: What have been the effects of activities of such unscrupulous publishers on the academic life of Nigerian authors and universities? What will be the way for Africa and Nigeria in particular to self-guard her authors from being exploited by unscrupulous publishers? What is the way forward for sanitizing journal publishing in Africa? Is it possible to have African journal standardization indexing for different disciplines such as agriculture? Sound answers to these questions will improve university administration and reputation in Africa.

Methodology

The study focuses on Nigeria with experiences from different universities. The study approach is a broad general description of the issues and experiences without naming much journals or publishers. In fact the aim is to develop concerns for building African citation indexes.

Results and discussion

The new trend of demanding publications in high reputation journals by academicians before they are promoted and the differentiation and classification of journals as well as dichotomy of journal indexing bodies force preference of some journals to others. Before the advent of OA journals, universities in Nigeria classified journals as local or foreign. Publication in foreign journals was not a major requirement for an academician to be promoted. Indexing bodies in an attempt to show the value of journals under their domain have fuelled the activities of journal citation reports (JCR). This has given rise to different measurements of journal impact factors. Given the phenomenon of university autonomy in Nigeria, it is possible for different universities to set varied standards with respect to certain criteria for promotion of academic staff. This variation may arise due to the following:

Are ones publications in a predatory journal or by predatory publishers? Some journals are classified as predatory by some universities and non-predatory by others since may were in existence before the advent of OA publishing system. Some of the journals listed as possible or potential predatory are also listed as authentic journals and indexed in reputable data bases like Scopus.

Low international reputation of academic activities in some African countries. Journal rating has a lot to do with instructional reputation and ranking. Institutions whose faculty members publish in high rated journals are more likely to get higher ranking than those whose faculty members publish in

predatory journals. It is obvious that high ranked journals will publish goof innovative research works. Thus it can be deduced that poor research capacity of some researchers in academic institutions move them to publish in predatory journals. Most often lack of funding results in poor research. This calls into question the level of research funding that is available in Africa. Apart from South Africa, it appears that most countries in sub Sahara Africa lack adequate funding for innovative research.

Frustration and conflict. The hurdles of climbing the academic ladder with an ambitious institution in poor resource countries like Nigeria, illustrated the paradigm of ‘pay, publish and yet perish’. Journals that few years ago were used by academia for their academic growth are today termed predatory and rejected by some universities while they are accepted by others. This creates frustrations to individuals who feel cheated; as a result, conflicts arise as some of their colleagues could have been promoted based on publications in the same journals. Conflicts have taken the form of abusive speeches, violence and even industrial actions.

Inter university migration. This is now a growing trend among some academics who are frustrated by their universities demanding increased standards of publications before they are promoted. Such academic staff migrate to other universities where publication standards are less stringent. Much as this practice may appear ridiculous, it has helped some individuals. However, it puts questions on the reputation of academic outlook of the country as a whole, and brings out disparities in academic standards among universities in Nigeria. Academic staff train students with the wealth of their research and publication experiences. When a uniform standard is lacking in research and publication across universities in a country; so will the quality of their products. This will reflect in the quality of labour and productivity in the country.

Capacity building in human and resource base. Most of the materials required for hosting OA journals are owned by non-African nations. Additionally, most African technicians have limited skills in modern communication or publication operations. It is not a surprise that those who own the technology tend to look down on those who don’t have. Africa needs to develop infrastructure to host their own publications.

A number of options and considerations are available for Africa to meaningfully benefit from its OA publications. These include:

Appropriate funding to support African OA publishing. According to EUC (2013), open access publishing (also referred to as ‘gold’ open access) means that an article is immediately provided in open access mode as published. In this model, the payment of publication costs is shifted away from readers paying via subscriptions. The business model most often encountered is based on one-off payments by authors. These costs (often referred to as Author Processing Charges, APCs) can usually be borne by the university or research institute to which the researcher is affiliated, or to the funding agency supporting the research. In other cases, the costs of open access publishing are covered by subsidies or other funding models. Thus open access publishing expects the author or his/her institution to pay for the cost of making the article available to the public. Institutional funding is therefore appropriate to remove this burden from the authors. This however will demand for some regulation to ascertain that the quality of the journal meets the standards of the respective university. Using such institutional regulation, it is possible to reduce the number of predatory journals gaining from the very limited financial resources of African universities and institutions and also ensure that publications are respected and recognised.

Rewards and dividends of publications. Since OA publishing does not take into consideration the possibility of replenishing the author's purse or commanding him/her for a publication, there is need for institutions and non government organizations (NGOs) to assist authors to cope with the cost of doing research by offering incentives to authors whose papers are published in OA journals. Once the list of such OA journals is made available, authors will be motivated to submit papers in such journals instead of predatory ones.

Development of an African indexing system. Africa needs to develop a policy putting in place an African indexing system, along with standards to ensure quality. Most often Africa tends to copy and follow foreign standards yet these fail to take into consideration the African context and development needs. Some countries and regions that understand their unique indexing needs have taken steps to develop their system. Some of these are:

- (i) National Academy of Agricultural Sciences (NAAS) Score of Scientific Journals based in India
- (ii) Thai-Journal Citation Index (TCI) Centre, Thailand
- (iii) Asian (ASEAN) Citation Index (ACI) (iv) Russian Science Citation Index
- (v) African Citation Index (Housed by The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa - CODESRIA)

It is time for Africa to start developing their own indexing policy that can reflect the true nature of publications in their zone. Africa need to set up institutions that will oversee the indexing policy of journals used in Africa. Only African institutions can understand the true nature of challenges and functions performed by publishers in the region. Mkpado (2013a and 2013b) has argued that Africa needs to take charge of her development issues and challenges.

Narongrit (2014) in support for ASEAN noted that ASEAN research will be more visible, improving university rankings for ASEAN universities, Students (both ASEAN and non- ASEAN) will have better and reliable information to select universities for their further studies, integrations of performance evaluation levels (national, regional and international) among others.

Regular check and monitoring. The standardization and indigenization policy will require regular checks and monitoring. This will eliminate abuses and motivate journal editors to strive to maintain high standards. As can be seen from Table 1, a number of publishers and journals are questionable. What is also worrisome is the increasing number of such publishers and journals. Beall (2015) reported starting two new lists that track new areas of questionable practices related to open-access journals. Some of these practices include calculation and publication of fake impact factors aimed at tricking scholars.

Table 1. Beall's list of Predatory and Stand alone Journals

Year	Predatory publishers	Stand alone journals
2011	18	Not available
2012	23	Not available
2013	225	126
2014	477	303
2015	693	507

Source: Beall's List of Predatory Publishers 2015

- (i) Most of these publishers and journals like other business in the other parts of the world have Africa as their target market. Africa needs to be more proactive in protecting her citizens and resources from exploitation by others. All professional bodies in Africa can develop their citation indices. These may include: Agricultural Sciences citation index
- (ii) Medical sciences citation index
- (iii) Arts and Humanities citation index
- (iv) Social science citation index
- (v) Science and technology citation index

Proper view and use of publication outlets. Many academic staff view publication solely for getting promotion. This erroneous view may account for the reason why some who attain the peak of their academic career hardly publish more. The real issue should be publishing to influence policy and development. Nigerian Universities need to value other publication outlets such as policy briefs, conference papers, working papers, monographs and bulletins. This will reduce the quest for journal publications which invariably is one reason why predatory OA journal list has kept increasing. And sad to say most of the predatory journals are fuelled by articles from Africa. It can be recalled that these other types of publications are usually published by reputable organizations and institutions. So, why is there so much dependence on journal articles?

Conclusion

The adverse results and implications of activities of predatory publishers and the ways forward to limit industrial actions and promote Africa's knowledge economy via the open access has been illustrated. The paper recommends capacity building in human and resource base, appropriate funding, rewards and dividends of publications, African journals standardization and indigenization policy to develop African indexing system, regular check and monitoring, proper view and use of publication outlets like policy briefs and working papers to sanitize educational system and improve the international academic reputation of the continent. The paper showed the way out for Africa to self guard her resources and reputation of academic institutions.

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