

Open Access and Editorial Quality Control

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ABSTRACT

Publishing is an enduring profession that has undergone series of metamorphic changes over time. Of unique impact is the innovative prowess and ingenious mobility which technology has brought into publishing. The journey from traditional to electronic publishing had been gradual but that of electronic has been swift and accelerative. The latest in the trend is Open Access (OA) which is facilitated by the technological cohesiveness of computer and internet. Open access is the current academic trend which permits nearly an unfettered access to published articles by numerous enthusiastic users. Open Access publishers are many just as its patronage is teeming. With the prevalence and ubiquitousness of OA, one cannot but be agitated by the issue of quality of publications which is a sine qua non to effective knowledge transmission and academic growth. This paper discusses the issue of quality control in Open Access under six sub-headings, namely: introduction, overview of Open Access, Concept of editing, Total Quality Management, OA quality control, and conclusion.

Keywords: Open Access, Editing, Quality control, Total Quality management

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1. INTRODUCTION

Open Access implies unhindered online allowance or entry to peer-reviewed articles and research publications in academic journals. Open access are publications that are available freely on the internet for the patronage of users. It does not mount any restriction on use, distribution and reproduction in any medium as long as the author/editor is properly attributed. Though originally intended for peer-reviewed academic journals, the tentacles of OA is accommodating book chapters, theses, and monographs. According to Zhingeng, Huiwei, and Wenjing (2010), Open Access is “a mechanism for advocating fair principle to promote the free exchange of academic ideas and the resulting free access of literature information in the network environment.”

There is no gain saying that OA is gaining ground faster and widely owing to the fact that the cost of conventional scholarly journal as well as library subscription prices are very high. It is this dissatisfaction, according to McCabe and Snyder (2005:455), which led to the proposal of a new business model for academic journals which is open access. Contrary to a traditional journal which derives a high percentage of its income through subscription fees, an open-access generates its income from authors' fees. “As of October 2004, the Directory of Open Access Journals [_www.doaj.org_](http://www.doaj.org) listed over 1,300 open-access journals across academic fields. Perhaps the most famous of these are the biomedical journals published by the Public Library of Science, founded by Nobel-prizewinning biologist Harold Varmus to compete against the top-tier journals in the field. These journals charge substantial author fees, \$1,500 per accepted paper (McCabe and Snyder, 2005:455).

However, the evolution of Open Access is not merely to raise a standard against the expensive journal but more importantly to provide alternative avenue of expression for scholars and researchers at reduced costs and with wider access and reach. Basically, OA offers relief to the problem of high cost of publication by removing access barriers that “will accelerate research, enrich education and share learning” (Ivwhighrehweta and Onoriode (2012:1) There is, therefore, a critical need to make research findings available to as many academics as possible free of charge. Because of this need, concerned institutions and organizations felt challenged and this precipitated The Budapest Open Access Initiative advocacy that the publishing cost of scientific knowledge should not be high so as to forestall high cost of gaining access to it. Open access has gained tremendous support from both authors and funders. While authors gain increased visibility of their work, science institutions and funders value the societal impact of freely available research results.

As a matter of fact, the benefits derivable from Open Access is tremendous notable among which are free access to information, and increased visibility of authors through citations and downloads. Okoye and Ejikeme (2010) cited by Ivwhighrehweta and Onoriode (2012:5) itemized the benefits of using open access journals as follows:

- i. It provides increased citation to published scholarly work.
- ii. Publications are made free for authors.
- iii. It increases the impact of researchers' work.
- iv. Articles can be accessed online free of charge.
- v. It provides free online access to the literature necessary for one's research.
- vi. It helps in career development.
- vii. It provides high quality scholarly work.

As expatiated by Budapest Open Access Initiative in <http://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/read>, "There are many degrees and kinds of wider and easier access to this literature. By 'open access' to this literature, we mean its free availability on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. The only constraint on reproduction and distribution, and the only role for copyright in this domain, should be to give authors control over the integrity of their work and the right to be properly acknowledged and cited."

2. OVERVIEW OF OPEN ACCESS

Open Access, like conventional publishing, also has its stages and processing transitions. The OA journey begins with Pre-print. Pre-print is a manuscript draft that is yet to undergo peer review, this is called raw manuscript in conventional publishing. Its opposite is Post-print. Post-print is a peer-reviewed version of the manuscript. This is akin to the assessed manuscript which is approved and accepted for publishing. Pre-prints and post-prints in Open Access repositories can be in form of journal articles, theses, dissertations, databases, course materials, audio files, video files, data files, institutional records, etc. After acceptance in conventional publishing, the manuscript undergoes a long and intensive process of origination and design through which the manuscript transits from galley stages to page-proof stage and eventually camera-ready-copy (CRC) stage which is the version that goes to press for mass printing. In OA, the final version of a manuscript after peer-review and processing by a publisher is called Version of Record (VOR). OA journal may be full or partial.

The partial OA journal is called Hybrid, it is a type of journal in which certain articles are made open access for a significantly higher price while the other articles remain toll access. Eprint is a digital version of a research document available online for a repository.

The following are the various forms of OA available.

- i. Green OA – This makes a version of the manuscript freely available in a repository.
- ii. Gold OA – This makes the final version of manuscript freely available immediately upon publication by the publisher.
- iii. Gratis OA – This means the paper is available to read free-of-charge with restrictions on its re-use.
- iv. Libre OA – This makes the paper available under an open licence with permission for it to be shared and reused depending on the kind of licence applicable.
- v. Diamond OA – This is a form of gold open access in which no author-processing charge (APC) is applied.

These are some salient features to note in OA. OA literature is not free to produce or publish. Although it is generally agreed that the cost of producing OA is cheaper than that of conventional publishing, this does not imply that it is entirely free.

a. OA repositories that are effective comply with the Open Archives Initiative (OAI). According to Suber, Open Archives Initiative protocol for metadata harvesting, which makes them interoperable. In practice, this means that users can find a work in an OAI-compliant archive without knowing which archives exist, where they are located, or what they contain (<http://bit.ly/petersuber>).

b. Open Access is not synonymous with universal access. This is because there are some obvious access barriers that may await users. According to Suber, these are:

- *Filtering and censorship barriers*. Many schools, employers, and governments want to limit what you can see.
- *Language barriers*. Most online literature is in English, or just one language, and machine translation is very weak.
- *Handicap access barriers*. Most web sites are not yet as accessible to handicapped users as they should be.
- *Connectivity barriers*. The digital divide keeps billions of people, including millions of serious scholars offline (<http://bit.ly/petersuber>).

c. The multidimensional function of OA is another notable element. OA serves the interests of many groups which include authors, readers, teachers and students, libraries, universities, journal, publishers, funding agencies and government. This is corroborated by Ivwighrehweta and Onoriode (2012:4).

It is not doubtable that OA is beneficial to wide range of beneficiaries. As opined by Cetto (2001) in Ivwighrehweta (2012:5),

OA goes beyond the academic circle and spreads its wings to other areas. An OA article can be read by anyone, including professionals, researchers in different fields, media practitioners, politicians, civil servants, etc. OA articles can often be found with a web search, using any general search engine or those specialised for the scholarly/scientific literature. He stated that librarians believe that OA promises to remove both the price barriers and the permission barriers that undermine library efforts to provide access to journal articles”.

3. CONCEPT OF EDITING

Editing is a very vital function in publishing be it conventional or electronic. It is the kernel of publishing and as such editor is indispensable in the book publishing chain which is procedural, systematic and sequential. How well an editor does her/his job determines the quality, the richness, the acceptance, and indeed the level of success of the publication. Akangbe (2008:1) opines that editing is a highly technical function which requires a high level of proficiency, a proficiency that is born out of training, experience on the job, repeated performances, and exposure over the years.

4. QUALITY CONTROL (QC) AND TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Quality Control (QC) is the steps taken to ensure that prescribed standards are met. In other word, it is an insistence, at all cost, that quality parametres which ultimately make the product of expected standard are enforced. QC therefore is an enforcement of prescribed indices that will ensure quality, standardization and excellence. Animasahun (2009) stated that quality simply means 'standard' and that 'standard' stands for excellence, durability or relative absence of defects.

A technical way of ensuring effective total quality in an organisation is by adopting Total quality Management (TQM). TQM is the scientific management of Men, Materials, Money and Machines for optimum results. It is a measure for improving quality, capacity and capability of productions and organisations. In conventional book publishing firms, TQM is the creation and maintenance of standardisation and excellence at every production stage. Quality measures are applied and ensured from manuscript acquisition stage through origination and design, pre-press and press to post-press. TQM is a management philosophy that focuses on human and work processes with the primary goal of ensuring customer satisfaction and continuously improving organisational performance. The practice today is to build total quality management into the management philosophy and practices of organisations and industries, and Open Access Journal publishing should not be an exception.

Rouse (2005) defines TQM as a comprehensive and structured approach to organisational management that seeks to improve the quality of products and services through ongoing refinements in response to continuous feedback. She maintains that TQM processes are divided into four sequential categories namely: Plan, Do, Check, and Act which she called the PDCA cycle. The planning phase identifies and defines the problem, collects relevant data and determines the root cause of the problem. The Doing phase advances and executes solution, it also reaches a decision on how to benchmark and assess its effectiveness. The Checking phase confirms results by juxtaposing the available pre and post intervention data while the Acting phase documents results, informs others of the process changes, and make recommendations for the problem to be addressed in the next PDCA cycle. Essentially, the emphasis of Total Quality Management is on conformance quality.

The theory of Total Quality Management which owes its origin to the work of an American, named Edwards Deming, who has been described as the "father of modern-day Japanese miracle" has its roots in a variety of disciplines: economics, social psychology, mathematical statistics and management services (Okunola, 2009). Today, it is built into the management philosophy and practices of the most successful international businesses (Adeleke, 2001). Adeleke (2001) describes Total Quality Management as a company-wide program that empowers workers and managers to continuously improve their processes and outputs to conform to user's requirement and to delight the customer. It is aimed at providing a customer-driven organisation to improve its products, processes and services.

The International Standard Organisation (ISO) 8402:1994 defines TQM as: “A management approach for an organisation, centered on quality, based on the participation of all its members and aiming at long-term success through customer satisfaction, and benefit to all members of the organisation, and the society” Rigby (2009) adds a further dimension to the definition of TQM. He describes TQM as a systematic approach to quality improvement that marries product and service specifications to customer performance. He adds that, TQM then aims to produce these specifications with zero defects. This, he says, creates a virtuous cycle of continuous improvement that boosts production, customer satisfaction and profits.

Obanya (2002) identifies important aspects of TQM that must be considered before attempting to implement TQM. According to him, these factors are: Customer-driven quality through which customer’s satisfaction is seen as the company’s highest priority; TQM leadership from top management which implies commitment and personal involvement of top management; Continuous improvement of all operations and activities; and Fast response to customer demands/inquires and prompt delivery of finished jobs as and when required by the customer. Others are Action based on facts as TQM approach is based on objective data, and provides a rational rather than an emotional basis for decision-making; Employee participation; and entronement of a TQM culture in all spheres of organisational operations.

On the whole, TQM is an effective method for attaining quality in all spheres of publishing processes be it conventional or electronic.

4.1 Open Access Quality Control

Series of questions have been raised about the quality of articles published in open access journals. These questions are crucial because the rate at which articles appear in OA journals is unprecedented. In fact, serious e-journals perform quality checks, and most commentators see no reason why the traditional refereeing system with editorial boards cannot be constituted in the online environment. Quality control is very essential for the success, acceptability and sustenance of Open Access. As a matter of fact, the issue of quality is a multidimensional process which must be monitored and emphasised progressively throughout the publishing process as discussed below.

Authorship: Assurance of quality begins right from the editorial stage. The quality of manuscript is pivotal to eventual quality of the publication so the author must know his/her onions, master the subject of article, and present it logically. The idea of a manuscript is usually conceived by an author and he is the one who assembles the message that forms a publication. The author is the initiator and originator of a publishing process and as such, s/he must be competent and has a mastery of his/her chosen area of study. The author must be methodical and logical in arranging his ideas in such a way that it will be acceptable and attractive to readers. The author must be current and qualified. A mediocre should not be chosen as an author.

The message being passed through the OA channel will be sub-standard if the author is not capable. For the authors to get their bearings well:

- i. their language must be standard accessible;
- ii. they must target a specific audience;
- iii. the article must not contain obscenity or foul language; nothing that is abusive, defamatory or goes contrary to the norms of the society should be contained in it; and
- iv. the article must meet the demands of the target audience.

Peer-review process: It is essential that an article be peer-reviewed before it is published in OA. Peer review process is essential to ascertain the quality of the manuscript. It should be added as a matter of priority that the review must be carried out blindly. Articles must be reviewed by experts from that field. Review of articles can be carried out at different levels according to Ostrowska (2009:2).

These levels are:

- i. Traditional – before publishing, by expert;
- ii. Open – before publishing, by expert, reviews available for readers, after publishing comments by readers allowed (BMJ);
- iii. Open and permissive – before publishing, at least three reviews (whatever positive or negative) of editorial board members, reviews available for readers, after publishing comments by readers allowed (Biology Direct);
- iv. Community – manuscript is public while discussed by community (and reviewed by invited reviewers), after this final version is being published (Journal of Interactive Media in Education, Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics);
- v. Permissive, post-publication commentary – minimal criteria for acceptance of the paper and after publication scientific community comments and annotates articles (PloS ONE);
- vi. No peer-review, post-publication commentary – (Nature Preceedings, Philica).

Editorial Board: It is very essential that the OA journal has an editorial board in place. The editorial board must be functional and active. It is not enough to have a list of redundant experts listed merely to fulfill all righteousness. It is disappointing that there are many online journals who either do not have an editorial board in place or fail to utilise the one constituted. It is a pride for a journal to have acknowledged scholars in its array of authors and editorial board members.

Choice of journal: As part of control measure, it is advisable to consult the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) (external link) while searching for a suitable open-access journal with the consciousness that quite a number of journals are not credible and as such they fail readily to meet the high demands of scientific quality assurance. Having chosen a journal, it is worthy also to find out whether the publisher is a member of Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA) or any other acknowledged industry association.

Copyright infringement

Copyright is a legal concept enacted by most government giving the creator of an original work exclusive right to it, usually for a defined period of time. Fundamentally, copyright is a law that gives people ownership over the things they have created. Copyright is a property right and can be sold or transferred to others. Authors of articles in academic journals, for example, frequently transfer the copyright in those articles to the journal's publisher. It is unfortunate however that infringement of rights is prevalent particularly in electronic publishing, Open Access inclusive. A thorough editorial quality control therefore must ensure originality of articles. Copyright infringement in Open Access can take two major forms: piracy and plagiarism.

Piracy: Piracy is simply put, a theft of intellectual property. It is an illegal action of claiming the ownership of another person's work. Piracy is copyright theft through counterfeiting of a work protected by copyright without the permission of the owners for the purpose of material reward for the infringer thereby causing harm to the material and moral interest of the author and publisher. This is cannot be ruled out of Open Access except and only if the editor and the editorial board is vigilant. Akangbe (2014:7) maintained that piracy is the major challenge facing the publishing industry in Nigeria. According to him, the available statistics show that piracy is an international crime that contributes up to 25% loss of revenue of publishing firms.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the act of stealing and copying of another person's idea or written work as if it is one's original work. Akangbe (2014:7) maintains that plagiarism is a deliberate attempt to represent as one's own the intellectual property of another. This means taking other people's intellectual property and incorporating it into one's own work without acknowledging the original source of the information or ideas. Plagiarism could be an intentional or unintentional use of someone else's ideas or writing in part or whole in one's writing without proper attribution.

Whatever form it takes, plagiarism is an outright act of fraud. Experience has shown that electronic published materials are highly susceptible to falsification, this is one other area that calls for editorial alertness.

4.2 Submission of article

Having selected an OA journal, the next stage is to submit ones article for the publication to the journal of one's choice. If ETH Zurich holds an institutional membership of the publishing house in question, one should enter ETH Zurich as a member institution in the submission process. The moment the accepted article has been published by the journal, one should upload it in ETH E-Collection. Most open-access publishers publish articles under open license which enables this kind of re-use. Through this, one guarantees the long-term archiving of one's research results by one's university.

Apart from the afore-mentioned, OA will be considered to be of high positive quality indicators if:

- i. the scope of the journal is clearly stated and well-defined;
- ii. the editor and editorial board are recognised experts in the field;
- iii. the Journal is affiliated with or sponsored by an established scholarly society or academic institution;
- iv. articles are within the scope of the journal and meet the standards of the discipline;
- v. any fees or charges for publishing in the journal are easily found on the journal web site and clearly explained;
- vi. articles have Digital Object Identifier (DOIs);
- vii. the Journal clearly indicates rights for use and re-use of content at article level;
- viii. the Journal has an International Standard Serial Number (ISSN);
- ix. the Journal is listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals; and if
- x. the Journal is included in subject databases and/or indexes.

In the same vein, some signals may also sound negative warnings thus indicating that such journal is not reliable. Such negative indicators include difficulty in locating or identifying the journal website, absence of definite information about the publisher on the website, absence of Instructions to authors; unavailability of Information on peer review and copyright on the journal web site, lack of or vagueness of statement on journal scope, non-permanent publisher's address, or having lead authors repeated in same issue.

5. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that OA is of immense value to information dissemination and knowledge circulation. With its plethora of advantages to scholars and researchers, its fortune cannot wane and its future is bright. It is essential however to lay emphasis on quality publications in OA by ensuring standard and excellence at every stage of production right from the author to the editor, editorial board, designer and web publisher.

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