



Evidence Summary

There are Discipline-Based Differences in Authors' Perceptions Towards Open Access Publishing

A Review of:

Coonin, B., & Younce, L. M. (2010). Publishing in open access education journals: The authors' perspectives. *Behavioral & Social Sciences Librarian*, 29, 118-132. doi:10.1080/01639261003742181

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Abstract

Objective – To determine reasons authors choose to publish in open access (OA) education journals, which provides readers with unrestricted free online access to published articles, and investigate ways in which publishing practices in the discipline of education affects authors' willingness to publish in these journals.

Design – Web-based survey questionnaire.

Setting – The survey was conducted over the Internet through email invitations.

Subjects – A total of 309 authors who published in OA journals in education participated in this survey for a response rate of 27.9%.

Methods – Researchers surveyed authors who published in selected education journals from 2007 to 2008. The journal titles were generated from the *Directory of Open Access Journals* (DOAJ). All chosen journals were peer-reviewed and published either original research or overviews of research results. In addition, all were in English and published in the United States. A total of 1,107 authors were invited to participate via email. The survey was delivered through commercial online survey tool

SurveyMonkey and consisted of multiple choice and open-ended questions. It was open from early March to April 16, 2009.

Main Results – The survey had a response rate of 27.9%. The majority of participants were tenured faculty (42.0%), tenure-track faculty (25.9%), and non-tenure track faculty (12.1%). The rest of participants (20%) consisted of adjunct instructors, graduate students, administrators, and individuals working in non-academic institutions such as government agencies.

Most authors surveyed have published between 10 and 20 articles (20.6%), or over 20 articles (30.4%) in print and electronic journals (e-journals). The majority of authors also reported that one (23.3%) or between 2 to 5 (54%) of their articles was published in OA format.

When choosing a journal for publications, authors surveyed ranked peer-review to be the most important determinant. Other important determinants included “good match” (ranked second most important) for authors’ manuscripts and reputation of the journal (third) and editorial board (fourth). Citation impact, such as the ISI impact factor (eighth), and copyright retention (tenth) were ranked as some of the least important factors. Researcher also noted a “surprisingly low” (p. 124) correlation between authors’ interest in copyright retention and practices of self-archiving. Thirty-seven percent of authors surveyed reported self-archiving at least one of their publications, but just over 35% of the same group considered copyright retention a determinant when choosing journals for publication.

Overall, only 22% of the authors surveyed deemed e-journals to be “less desirable” than print journals. The majority of both tenured faculty (77.4%) and tenure-track faculty (72%) surveyed found e-journals “acceptable” or difference between print and electronic journal format “not an issue.” Only 16.8% of authors

surveyed had published in journals that required author fees. Moreover, over 56% of authors indicated they would not publish in journals requiring such fees.

Most authors reported they were either very aware (45.1%) or somewhat aware (38.9%) of the concept of OA publishing. However, their perceptions of OA publishing varied:

- 47.7% believed OA journals have faster publication times, while 33.6% disagreed and 18.5% offered no opinion.
- 57.3% of authors believed OA journals have larger readerships. However, when asked whether OA articles would be cited more frequently than others, only one third of authors agreed, while one third disagreed and one third offered no opinion.
- Just under half of the authors (49.4%) thought OA journals are not less prestigious than subscription based journals, while 18.8% had no opinion.

Lastly, it should be noted that only 7.1% of authors credited their institution’s library for making them aware of the OA publishing concept. Most credited their colleagues (42.1%), Google searches for publishing opportunities (40.4%), and professional societies (29.3%) for raising their awareness of OA. Moreover, based on voluntary general comments left at end of the survey, researchers observed that some authors viewed the terms open access and electronic “synonymously” and thought of OA publishing only as a “format change” (p.125).

Conclusion – The study revealed some discipline-based differences in authors’ attitudes toward scholarly publishing and the concept of OA. The majority of authors publishing in education viewed author fees, a common OA publishing practice in life and medical sciences, as undesirable. On the other hand, citation impact, a major determinant for life and medical sciences publishing, was only a minor factor for authors in education. These findings provide

useful insights for future research on discipline-based publication differences.

The findings also indicated peer review is the primary determinant for authors publishing in education. Moreover, while the majority of authors surveyed considered both print and e-journal format to be equally acceptable, almost one third viewed OA journals as less prestigious than subscription-based publications. Some authors also seemed to confuse the concept between OA and electronic publishing. These findings could generate fresh discussion points between academic librarians and faculty members regarding OA publishing.

Commentary

Although this study raised a number of interesting issues, a close examination using the EBL Critical Appraisal Checklist (Glynn, 2006) indicates that the overall validity of this study is less than 75%. Therefore, readers are encouraged to use the results for generating research ideas, but not for drawing generalized conclusions. Additionally, the survey instrument was not appended to the article, limiting the transparency of this research.

A fundamental flaw of this study is the disparity between its research objective and choice of population sample. The researchers intended to examine authors' perspectives on publishing in open access education journals, but only surveyed authors with experience in publishing in limited types of OA journals. Therefore, the study results cannot be generalized to represent all authors' perspectives. For instance, the majority of authors surveyed indicated moderate to high levels of understanding of OA publishing and perceived OA journals to be no less prestigious than print, yet it would be invalid to conclude all authors in education hold

such knowledge. This study did not include perspectives of education authors who have published in non-peer reviewed OA journals, nor those who have not published in any OA publications, including those who may have chose not to publish in this medium due to negative perceptions of OA.

Additionally, as indicated by the comments submitted with the surveys, some authors appeared to think of the terms "electronic" and "open access" as synonymous concepts. This is a significant misunderstanding: OA journals provides unrestricted electronic access to published articles, while electronic journals includes both journals that follows the OA model and those that that charge fees for access. The researchers' own remarks indicate that definitions of "e-journal" and "open access journal" were not provided in the survey. Thus, all responses regarding authors' perceptions towards either electronic or OA publishing may be unreliable. For instance, it is possible that when asked to compare electronic and print journals, some authors' answers were based on their perception of OA journals instead of e-journals.

Despite issues highlighted above, the rest of the survey questions appeared well constructed and investigate pertinent aspects of respondents' perceptions of OA. Given appropriate population sampling and provision of definition for key terms, the rest of the survey could provide a solid template for those who wish to further examine perceptions towards OA publishing in different academic disciplines.

References

- Glynn, L. (2006). A critical appraisal tool for library and information research. *Library Hi Tech*, 24(3), 387-399.