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## Open Access Scholarly Communication Practices at the University of Zambia

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## Open Access Scholarly Communication Practices at the University of Zambia

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### **Abstract**

Open access plays significant roles in expanding access by enabling scholars more equitable participation in research and development activities globally. However, little is known about researchers' awareness and adoption of open access at the University of Zambia. To address this gap, this study investigated open access scholarly communication practices at Zambia's premier University. Using a survey research design, data was collected from a sample of 67 participants via an online questionnaire. Findings showed that though all (67) of the respondents were aware of open access and were upbeat towards this new form of scholarly communication, 79.1% had used OA platforms more to access scholarly content than to disseminate their own research output while 21.9% used open access publishing models to disseminate their research output. Misapprehension about open access and lack of digital skills were the major barriers to open access adoption. The paper recommends that the open access committee at the University should proactively sensitise the University community on



shared globally. In this paper, researchers argue that whether in times of pandemic or not, OA to new knowledge is critical to accelerate advances in finding solutions to societal issues. Accordingly, OA to scientific knowledge production should be the *modus operandi* in the time and age we live in.

Despite the growing mass of literature on OA globally (e.g. Abrizah, 2012; Dulle and Minishi-Majanja, 2011), there is a dearth of empirical findings regarding this topical issue at UNZA. Owing to the deficiency of research on this subject, there is a gap in knowledge regarding the level of faculty participation in OA initiatives. It is against this background that this study was undertaken.

## **1.2 Research objectives**

The main objective of the study is to investigate faculty members' awareness and adoption of OA. The research was guided by three specific objectives as follows:

- i. To ascertain awareness and adoption of OA among faculty members at UNZA,
- ii. To establish the current practices of faculty staff with regard to OA publishing and,
- iii. To determine the barriers hindering faculty from adopting OA models.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Scholarly Communication**

This literature review focuses on the various OA publishing models such as journals and institutional repositories, and situates this research within current discussions on OA. While the term OA has been in use for more than twenty years, changes in researcher behaviour, publisher approaches and research funder policies suggest that it is now a necessary approach to publishing and disseminating research outputs (Pinfield, 2015).

In a nutshell, OA is a form of scholarly publishing in which materials are 'digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions.' The Budapest OA Initiative (BOAI), one of the original efforts to codify and support OA in a formulaic way, defined OA as scholarly articles that have: OA has the potential to have a significant impact on researchers, faculty, publishers, and libraries.

According to Suber (2013), OA refers to peer-reviewed research literature, which is 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.

## **2.2 Faculty awareness of OA**

A survey by Sheikh (2019) revealed that although majority of the Pakistani faculty members (71.5%) were aware of the scholarly OA before this survey, their awareness level about OA related resources and initiatives was very low. The Pakistani faculty members used open access venues more frequently to access scholarly contents rather than to publish their own research works. A lack of awareness to publish in OA venues, and publication fees of OA journals were the key challenges faced by the Pakistani faculty members. The attitudes of faculty members towards OA were very positive in all contexts.

A study by Yang and Li (2015) on awareness and attitude of faculty towards OA publishing and institutional repository discovered that majority of the faculty were well disposed to OA publishing. A survey by Obuh and Bozimo (2012) examined the awareness and use of OA scholarly publications by Library and Information Science lecturers in Nigeria. The study revealed a high level of usage of OA publications by both senior and junior lecturers and low level of awareness of OA concepts among lecturers.

Rodriguez's (2014) study explored faculty members' awareness of OA publishing and focused on how factors such as age, seniority, or rank affected their attitudes. While their results pointed to a growing trend in self-reported awareness of OA across all demographic groups, they identified a need for further research to explore "discipline specific concerns and OA publishing activity related to the tenure process.

## **2.3 Faculty adoption of OA**

A study by Obuh and Bozimo (2012) investigated OA publication usage among lecturers in the Department of Library and Information Science in Southern Nigeria. The results show similar levels of usage among senior and junior cadre lecturers in terms of high priority in sourcing OA materials for research and also in rate of retrieving OA contents.

An empirical study by Gladys and Ibrahim (2015) examined the adoption of OA initiative for teaching and research in Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. The study revealed that lecturers

are familiar with the OA initiative which comprises of the OA institutional repositories and OA journals. The main recommendation made is that the university should harness the awareness of OA initiative by enlightening lecturers on the adoption of OA initiative through bulleting, conferences, seminars and workshops.

#### **2.4 Barriers to open access**

Some skeptics consider OA publishing as low quality, not peer-reviewed, or vanity publishing (Creaser et al., 2010). In countries where OA is not common practice, academics tend to associate OA journals with “ephemeral publishing, poor archiving and low prospects for career advancement” (Peekhaus, Proferes, 2015). Singson, Thiyagarajan and Dkhar (2015) suggest that these negative perceptions and attitudes towards OA journals can be overcome through faculty outreach by librarians. Kenneway (2011) however dismissed the fear about quality when he expressed that not all publications emanating from OA are not peer-reviewed, some were, though this might have been frivolously done.

A study by Musa (2016) identified poor ICT infrastructure; low level of awareness; unstable power supply; slow Internet connectivity; lack of sensitisation to adopt OA; lack of ICT skills and inadequate advocacy for OA in academic and research institutes as key limitations to OA. A related study by Ivwighrehweta and Onoriode (2012) identified lack of knowledge of the existence of OA journals; improper archiving; power outage; limited computer terminals; lack of Internet search skills and download delay amongst others as constraints to effective use of OA.

Similarly Okoye and Ejikeme (2011) identified inadequate skills to navigate the Internet; unstable power supply; unavailability of Internet facilities; unstable financial supports and lack of knowledge of existence of OA journals as constraints to use of OA among researchers.

Lack of awareness of OA journals as alternatives to traditional outlets is also a significant hurdle. A study of researchers in Ghana showed that while the majority of respondents were aware of OA journals, their level of understanding varied considerably (Atiso et al., 2017). A study by Dulle (2010) on the factors affecting the adoption of OA research activities in Tanzanian public universities found that majority of research scholars are aware of OA.

### 3. Methodology

A survey research design was employed in which a questionnaire was the main data collection tool. An online questionnaire was emailed to all (708) full time faculty staff. This method was adopted owing to the fact that some academics at UNZA have a tendency of not responding to other researchers' questionnaires. Out of the 708 questionnaires that were emailed, 67 were successfully completed and returned to the researchers. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse quantitative data. Questionnaires were sent out in March 2020 while data analysis took place in May 2020. The study was restricted to one institution, therefore generalization to other institutions is to be cautioned, but there are important lessons to be learnt.

### 4. Findings

The findings are presented based on the research objectives, highlighting the fundamental issues contained in the questionnaire. Out of the 708 questionnaires, 67 copies, representing a response rate of 9.4% were fully completed, returned and found usable for data analysis.

#### 4.1 Profile of the respondents

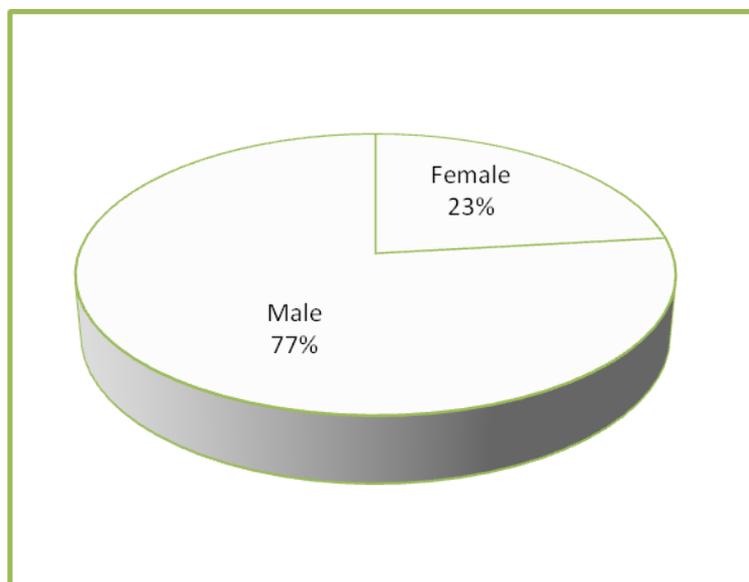


Figure 1: Gender of respondents

Out of the 67 respondents, 51(72%) were male and 16 (28%) were female. The reason for this discrepancy could be attributed to the fewer numbers of female lecturers as compared to their male counterparts.

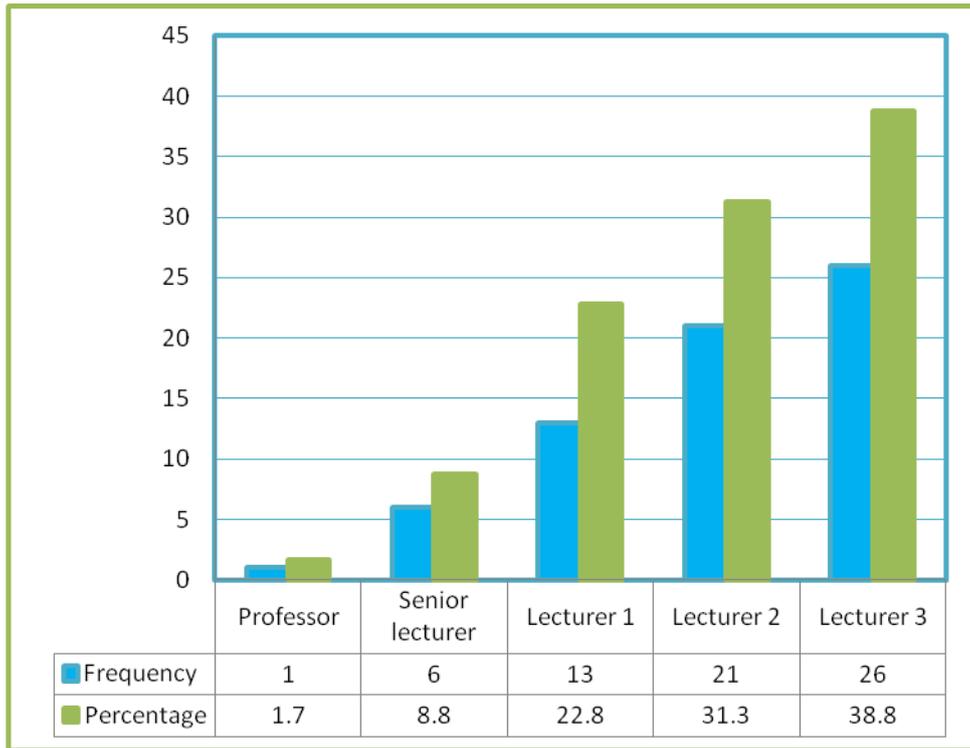


Figure 2: Academic rank of respondents

The rank cohort shows that, 6 (8.8%) were senior lecturers, 13 (22.8%) were at the rank of lecturer I, 21 (31.3%) were at the level of lecturer II and 26 (38.8%) were in the band of lecturer III.

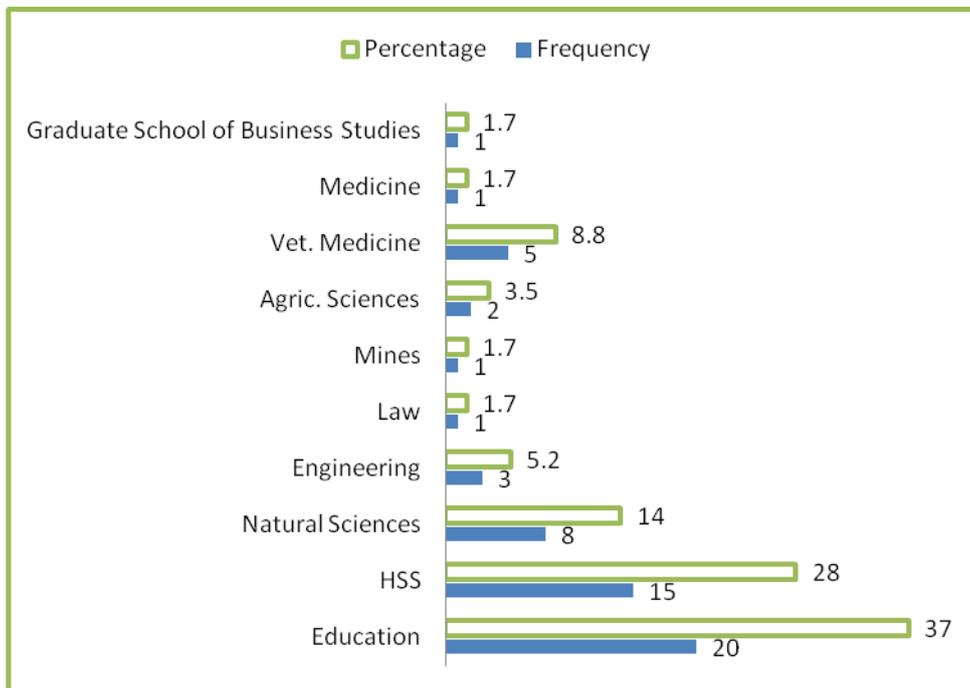


Figure 2: Affiliation of respondents

With regard to the respondents' affiliation, the School of Education contributed the highest number with 37%, followed by the School of HSS with 28%. The Schools of Law and Mines had 1.7% each.

#### 4.2 Awareness of Open Access

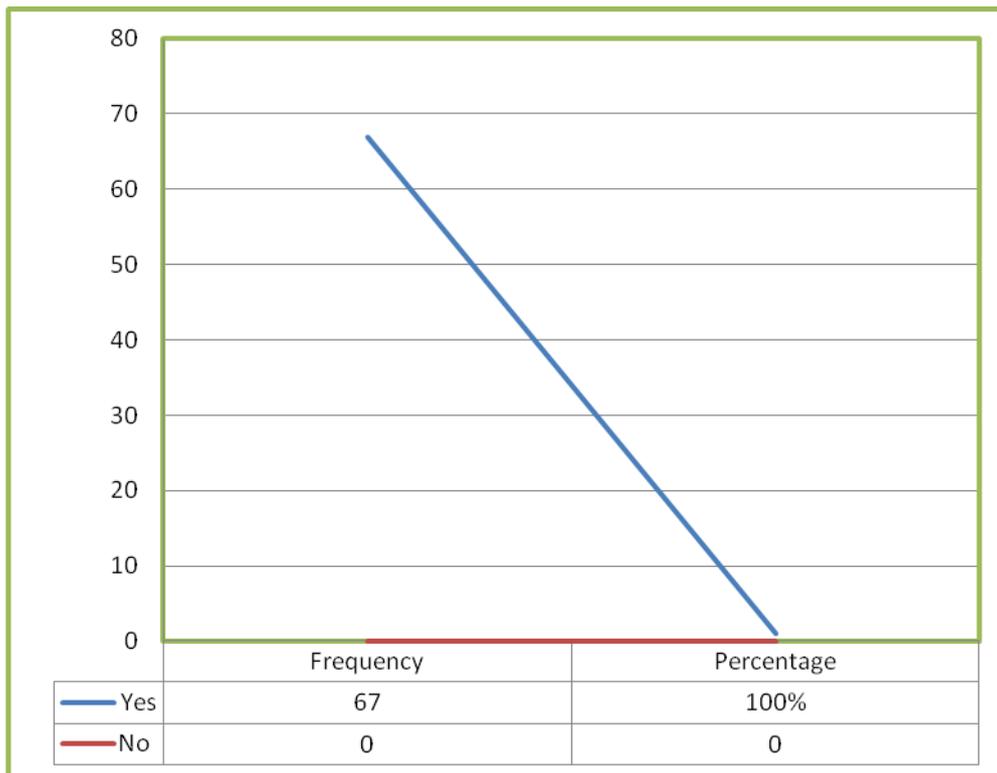


Figure 2: Knowledge of open access

The respondents were asked whether or not they had heard about OA prior to their participation in this survey and if so how they had become informed about it. The result shows that all 67 (100%) the respondents were aware of the concept of open access.

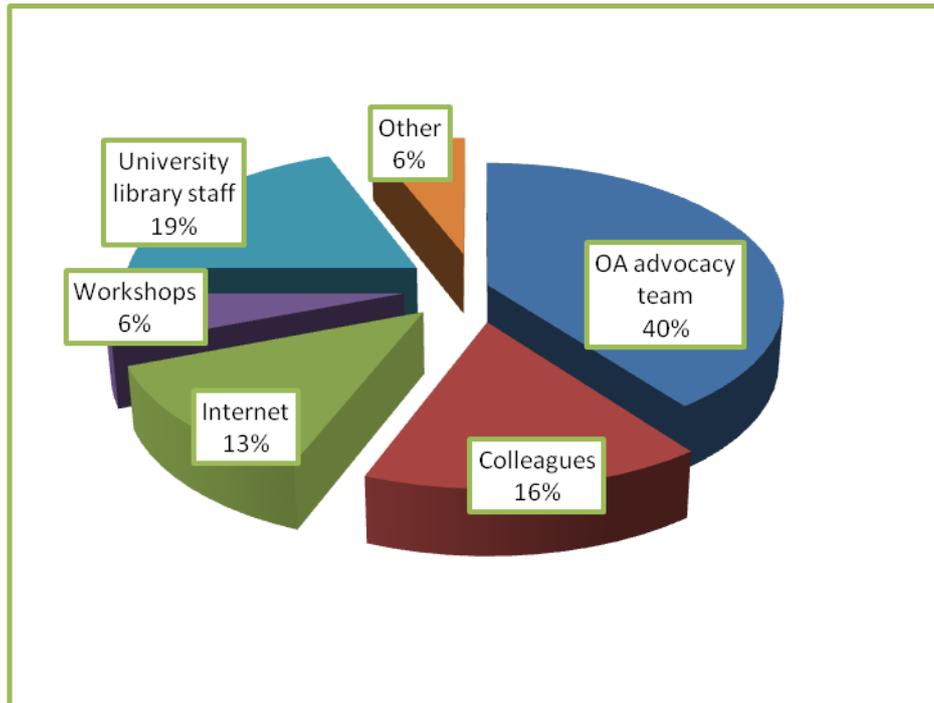


Figure: Sources of awareness of OA

With regard to sources of awareness of open access, Table 3 above shows that out of the 67 respondents, 27 (40.2%) learnt of OA from the University OA Advocacy Team, 19.4% from the University library staff, while 5.9% indicated workshops.

#### 4.3 Open Access adoption and usage

OA usage was investigated to determine the extent to which researchers accessed and disseminated scholarly content through the open access mode of scholarly communication. Table 4 present results on researchers' usage of OA.

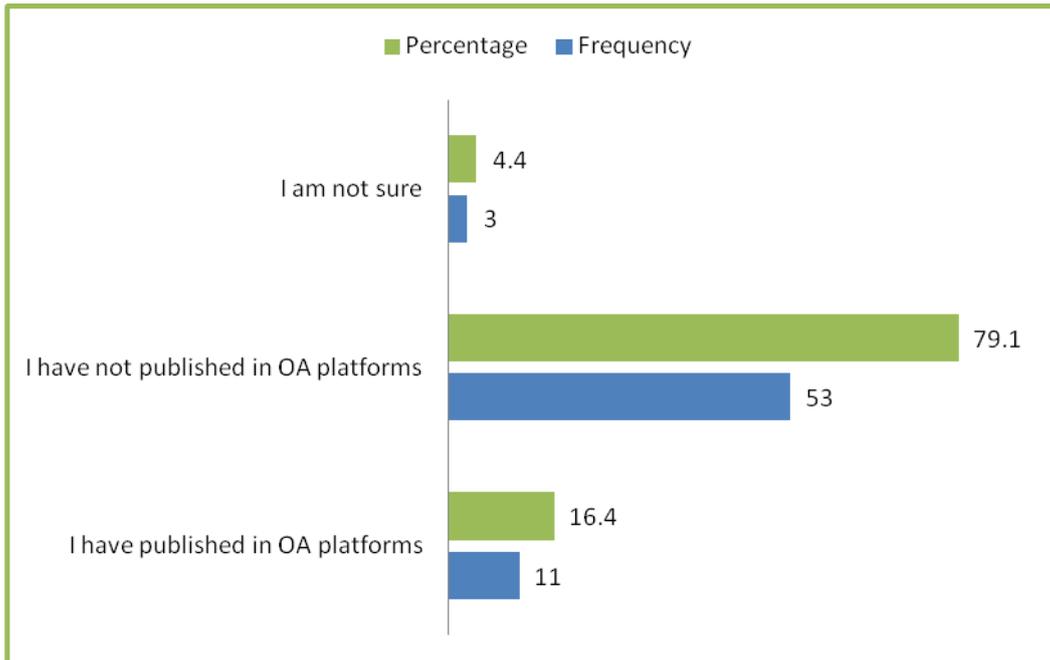


Figure 3: Adoption and use of OA

It can be noted from table 4 above that the majority (85.07%) of the respondents had not published in OA channels while 10.4% claimed to have published in such platforms. 4.4% of the respondents were not sure.

#### 4.4 Motivation for using Open Access

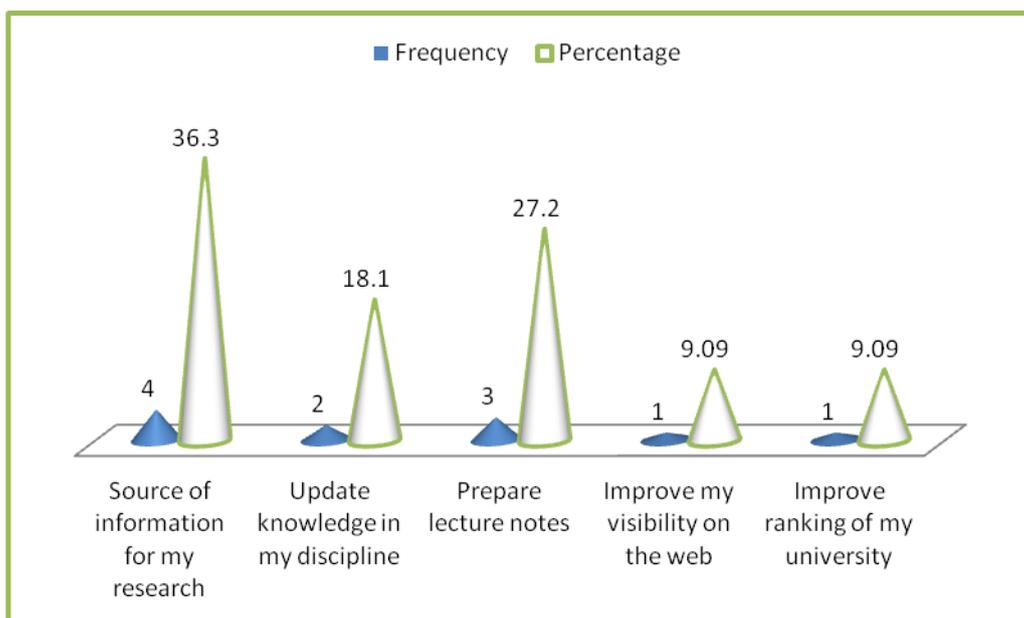


Figure 5: Motivation for using OA

The 11 respondents that claimed to have published via OA channels were asked to indicate their motivation for using OA. Findings indicate that 4 (36.3%) used OA because it was a valuable source of information for their research, 3 (27.2%) used OA to update themselves in their subject disciplines, 2(18.1%) used OA to help them prepare lecture notes, one (9.09%) used OA to improve their visibility on the web and one (9.09%) used OA to improve ranking of the university.

#### 4.5 Factors for not adopting Open Access

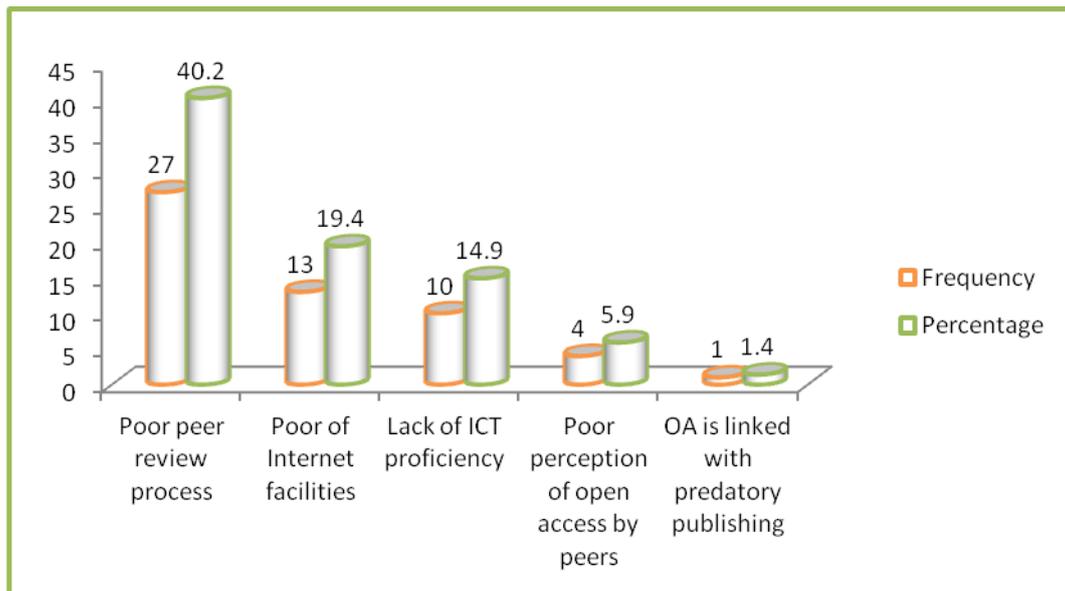


Figure 6: Reasons for not using OA

The 53 respondents that said they do not publish in OA platforms were further asked to give their reasons for not using these outlets. Table 6 above shows that 27(40.2%) had a poor perception of OA resources, 13(19.4%) associated OA with predatory publishing, 10(14.9%) opined that OA publications had a poor peer review process, 4 (5.9%) lamented poor Internet facilities and 1(1.4%) lacked proficiency in the use of ICTs. These results point to the fact that OA is a relatively new concept in Zambia, hence the need to proactively promote it to all stakeholders.

The 53 respondents were further probed to disclose their scholarly communication channels. Out of the 53 respondents, 41% used closed/non-OA journals for publishing their research findings and 7% were not sure of the publication outlets they used. 5% did not respond to the question.

#### 4.6 Open Access adoption challenges

Despite the general OA support by the majority of faculty as noted above, several challenges should be addressed for effective exploitation of OA opportunities to improve scholarly communication at UNZA. These challenges are briefly highlighted in Table 7 below.

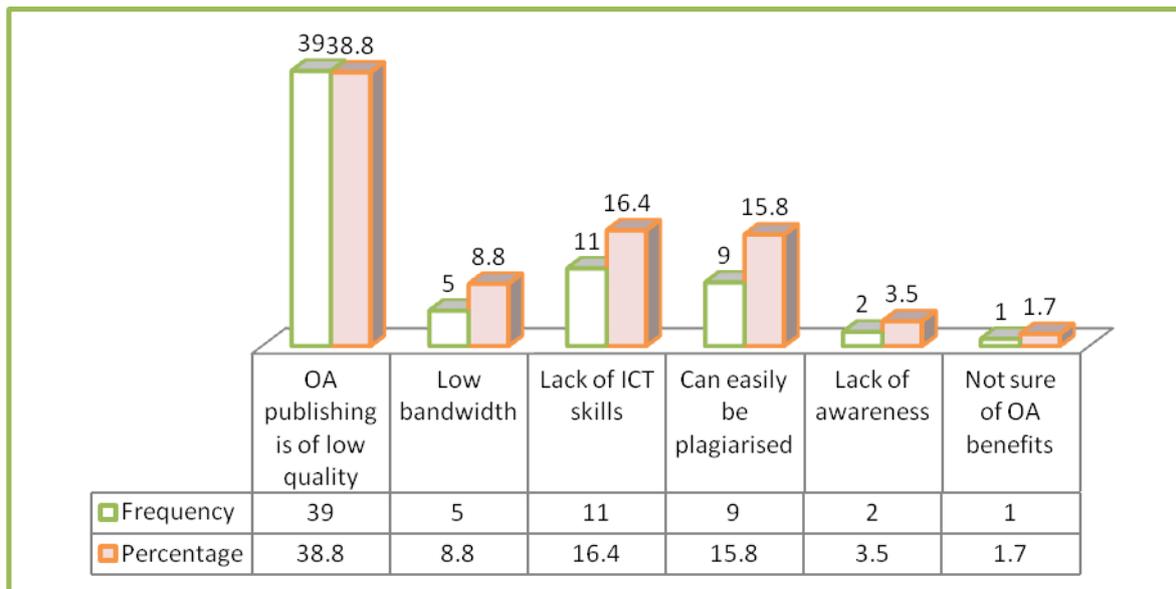


Figure 4: OA adoption challenges

Several factors were identified as constraints challenging academics' usage of OA systems. As shown in Table 7, most respondents (38%) considered OA publishing as of low quality compared to subscription based resources. The other reasons that were highly ranked included: the general lack of ICT skills (11%) and the likelihood that OA publications would be plagiarised (16.4%).

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 OA awareness

On the awareness of OA and how they become aware of it, the study has established that all (100%) the respondents were aware of the concept of OA. This is attributed to the presence of the OA advocacy team at UNZA which promotes OA activities in the institution. This finding is consistent with that of Iqbal and Ali (2017) who reported that academics had high level of awareness of OA. This result however, contradicts that of Lwoga and Quetier (2015) who observed that inadequate level of OA awareness may have contributed to

low rate of engagement with open access activities. The mere fact that all respondents were aware of OA is in itself a positive sign for the open access initiative.

### **Sources of OA information**

Regarding the sources of awareness of OA, it is noteworthy that the major sources were through the University OA Advocacy Team and University Library staff. This finding is in agreement to that of Togia and Korobili (2014) and Oyedipe (2017) who opined that self knowledge and Internet searching were the major sources of awareness about OA among faculty. These results entail that advocates of OA can use a blend of methods in promoting this mode of scholarly publishing to faculty researchers.

### **5.2 Current OA publishing practices**

OA usage **practices** were investigated to determine the extent to which academics accessed and disseminated scholarly content through OA platforms. The study found that majority (79.1%) of the respondents had not published in OA channels while 21.9% claimed to have published in such platforms. Thus, we may infer that these results agreed with the findings of Eqbal and Khan (2007) who indicated that lecturers were more aware of OA content than their actual use.

With regard to the motivation for using OA, accessing information for their research and for teaching was major factor. This is findings are in agreement to those of Oyedipe, Adekunmisi and Akinbode (2017) who indicated that lecturers used OA as a means of conducting research, updating general knowledge.

As regards the reason for non use of OA, findings indicate that 27(40.2%) had a negative perception of OA resources. These results point to the fact that OA is a relatively new concept in Zambia, hence the need to proactively promote it to all stakeholders.

### **5.3 Adoption challenges of OA**

Several factors were identified as constraints for the adoption of OA systems. As shown in Table 7 above, 38% of the respondents considered OA to be of low quality compared to subscription based resources. The other reasons that were included: the general lack of ICT skills (11%) and the likelihood that OA publications would be plagiarised (16.4%). These

findings corroborate previous studies that found that uncertainties over later publishing of OA articles elsewhere, violation of publishers' copyrights, and plagiarism of OA papers are among the cited respondents' deterrents for their contribution to institutional repositories (Okoye and Ejikeme, 2011). It would therefore be necessary for UNZA to address these challenges to foster the adoption of OA. It is necessary to address these challenges to foster the adoption of OA in Zambia and other institutions elsewhere with a similar research environment.

## **6. Conclusion and recommendations**

This study investigated the OA scholarly publishing practices among UNZA researchers. It is clear from the findings that most researchers at UNZA were aware of and positive towards the OA concept. However, the majority used OA outlets to access rather than publish their scholarly output. Despite their awareness of the OA initiatives, they use OA outlets to access other people's research output rather than disseminate their scholarly productivity in these channels. ICT skills inadequacy and academics' reservations were major hindrances to the adoption of OA.

Based on the above findings, the study recommends that:

1. Proactive marketing of OA initiatives to faculty members on the various benefits, challenges and policies guiding OA use.
2. Stakeholders should prioritise awareness campaigns among faculty members to enhance effective use of OA Scholarly publishing,
3. OA resource links should be provided via library websites for the effective marketing of OA resources.

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