Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Evidence Summary

Promoting Open Access in Israeli Academic Libraries: What Needs to Change?

A Review of:

Reviewed by:
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Abstract

Objective – The study aims to explore and examine how Israeli librarians perceive their role and the academic library's role in promoting open access (OA) publishing; identify the barriers, challenges, and difficulties in implementing OA; and determine the factors and needs that are required to promote OA. By examining these aspects, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of OA promotion in Israeli academic libraries, the challenges faced by librarians, and the necessary changes and support required to enhance OA adoption in the country's academic institutions.

Design – Qualitative design using semi-structured interviews.

Setting – University libraries in Israel.

Subjects – One representative from each of the ten existing universities in Israel. The ten participants held positions as administrators of the library system at their institution (50%), directors of disciplinary libraries (30%), or directors of information systems in academic libraries of Israeli universities. Among

the subjects, 90% were female. In terms of seniority, 60% of respondents had been employed by their institution for over 10 years, while 40% had been less than 10 years in their current positions.

Methods – Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom between April and June of 2020. The interviews were based on items from existing surveys on librarians' attitudes towards open access and changes in academic library practices. The authors used thematic analysis to categorize and code the interview responses. This "bottom-up" approach allowed researchers to identify common expressions and recurring themes. The analysis yielded 1,264 statements classified into three main categories with several sub-categories. To ensure reliability, 25% of the statements were analyzed by a second coder, resulting in a Cohen's Kappa of .86 (.8 and above is rated as "almost perfect"). The researchers ensured trustworthiness of data by adhering to four principles: truth-value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality of data.

Main Results – The interview data revealed that, in general, librarians see their role as crucial in advising researchers about OA publishing. They view themselves as responsible for implementing changes related to OA after institutional policies are set. The authors identify a myriad of barriers to overcome if OA is going to grow and become a more accepted practice of publishing for Israeli researchers. These barriers include, but are not limited to, lack of budget for OA agreements, lack of cooperation from university management, researchers' unfamiliarity with OA and fears about predatory journals, the influence of journal impact factors, and lack of personnel and training for librarians. In order to overcome these barriers, librarians believe they need clear national and institutional OA policies, as well as cooperation and collaboration between academic institutions on OA initiatives. Librarians also believe that systematic training for library staff in OA publishing is imperative, along with guidance and incentives for researchers to publish in OA journals. The results also yielded qualitative data about librarians' current involvement in OA, which include participating in OA agreements through library consortia, operating current research information systems (CRIS), promoting institutional policies, and interfacing with university administration on OA issues. The study also revealed that there is a desire among librarians to establish the library as the central body for OA matters within their institutions.

Conclusion – Librarians see their role as crucial in promoting open access (OA) publishing, particularly in advising researchers and implementing changes after institutional policies are set. Overall, the study concludes that while librarians see themselves as playing important roles in promoting OA, they face numerous challenges and require additional support and resources to fulfill this role effectively. The research highlights the need for systemic changes at both institutional and national levels to advance OA adoption in Israeli academic institutions.

Commentary

The study addresses an important and timely issue in academic librarianship: the evolving role of librarians in promoting open access publishing. As the OA landscape continues to transform, understanding librarians' perspectives is crucial. By examining the Israeli context specifically, the study provides in-depth insights into the unique challenges and opportunities in one national academic library system. This focused approach allows for nuanced analysis. The use of semi-structured interviews with librarians from all ten Israeli universities provides rich, detailed data on librarians' lived experiences and perceptions. The qualitative approach is well suited to exploring this complex topic and exposing important barriers to OA promotion and adoption in Israel. While focused on Israel, many findings likely have relevance to academic libraries globally facing similar OA challenges. However, care should be taken in generalizing results to other contexts. The authors claim that the applicability of the data was "achieved by selecting librarians from different universities, genders, and seniority" (Hadad & Aharony, 2024, 468). Yet, 90% of respondents were women and we do not know if this is representative of the profession. Demographics related to gender representation as a whole in Israel would have been appropriate to share.

A larger sample size could have enhanced the study. It would have been interesting to include two representatives from each university to allow for comparisons not just across institutions, but also within them. Despite this, the study still provides valuable insights into the perspectives of Israeli academic librarians on open access publishing.

The study opens up avenues for further research, such as comparative studies with other countries, quantitative follow-ups, or longitudinal studies tracking changes over time.

After assessing the quality of the study using The CAT: A Generic Critical Appraisal Tool created by Perryman and Rathbun-Grubb (2014), I found the quality to be high. Hadad is a lecturer in the Department of Digital Learning Technologies at the Israel Academic College. Aharony is a full professor at Bar-Ilan University. In addition to this article, the authors have co-authored five other peer-reviewed articles together on issues related to open access since early 2023. An extensive literature review is included to help give context to the study and the results of the interview are clearly communicated both textually and visually. The methods employed are also clear and the conclusion rests firmly on the analysis of the collected interview data.

References

Hadad, S., & Aharony, N. (2024). Librarians and academic libraries' role in promoting open access: What needs to change? *College & Research Libraries, 85*(4), 464–478. https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.85.4.464

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