



Information Research – Vol. 30 No. iConf (2025)

# Open access: Māori perspectives on publishing

Spencer Lilley

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47989/ir30iConf47275>

## Abstract

**Introduction.** This short paper presents the results of a project that looked at Māori researchers' attitudes to open access publishing. It presents an overview of their engagement with green and gold publishing options, including barriers and challenges they encountered when considering open access publishing and the role that Māori liaison librarians have in encouraging Māori academics to utilize the range of open access resource opportunities available.

**Method.** In this study, six Māori researchers and four Māori liaison librarians were interviewed using a kaupapa Māori methodological approach.

**Results.** The results were analysed using a tikanga Māori focused lens

**Conclusions.** Although the Māori researchers in this study are aware of open access publishing, they were unsure of how to distinguish between the different models on offer and would benefit from regular engagement and advice from Māori liaison librarians.

## Introduction

Scholarly publishing traditions have changed quite dramatically over the last 30 years, with the dependence on print-based journals gradually shifting to hybrid publication (Print and Online), and online only access. Pinfield et al. (2020) identify the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the turning point for open-access publishing. Advocacy for open-access publishing has also resulted in publishers changing their business models, including the introduction of Article Processing Charges (APC), which shift the cost of publishing to academic authors. The costs associated with these can extend into five figures if an author wishes to make their article available as gold open access in a highly ranked journal, for example, gold open access for *Nature* (2024) is £8890/ \$12290/ €10290. However, other journals provide different choices for their authors, including freely open access or an option to load a pre-print copy of manuscripts to institutional repositories. In response to changing market conditions, major publishers are entering into read and publish agreements. New Zealand universities have access to these as consortium members of the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL). These agreements enable university researchers the opportunity to publish their research outputs in open-access journals without having to pay an APC. There are also growing expectations that scholarly outputs from publicly funded research in New Zealand will be made openly available as a way of ensuring equity of access to these materials. While in addition to open access publishing, there is increased advocacy for researchers to deposit their data in open data repositories to make it discoverable and useable, this is currently not a requirement for publicly funded projects.

Based on empirical research, this paper focuses on the attitudes of researchers and librarians identifying as Māori (Indigenous peoples of New Zealand) to open-access publishing. The paper also considers the ethical issues associated with making Indigenous knowledge freely available via open access and open data platforms.

## Background

Māori academics employed in New Zealand universities are expected to produce high-quality research outputs in nationally and internationally ranked journals. Although currently suspended, university researchers over the last two decades have been required to participate in the performance-based research fund (PBRF) evaluation exercise. This exercise awarded a quality score for each researcher which was measured against criteria to determine the contribution their research was making to creating leading-edge knowledge. While the research sector waits for the PBRF to be resumed or for the introduction of a new form of research assessment, researchers continue to have pressure placed on them by their institutions to publish in highly ranked publications. This pressure seriously impacts where researchers decide to publish or make their research available. From the point of view of their institution, a researcher should be aiming for publishers and journal titles which are considered to be highly ranked and prestigious, as this will greatly increase the reputation of the university and the individual. However, for a Māori researcher who has a strong commitment to kaupapa Māori (Māori methodological and theoretical approach) research principles, this is at odds with their sense of responsibility to the communities they are working with, who should be the primary beneficiaries of the research they have participated in and contributed to. Open access publishing provides researchers with the opportunity to make their research freely available, while also complying with the wishes of their institution. However, a recent report from the Council of New Zealand University Librarians (CONZUL, 2022), revealed that a significant majority of New Zealand research remains behind publisher paywalls. Country rankings from Scimago show that in 2022 their assessment of documents from New Zealand showed that only 52.18% of these were available as open access, although, as shown in Table 1, this is a vast improvement from the results in 2017. The CONZUL (2022) report stated that if all eligible manuscripts produced by New Zealand researchers in 2019 were deposited in repositories, the open access rate for that year would have increased to 70%.

Year	Number of documents: Open Access	Percentage of annual outputs	Number of documents: Not Open Access	Percentage of annual outputs
2017	7073	41%	10177	59%
2018	7719	43.25%	10127	56.75%
2019	8332	45.29%	10065	54.71%
2020	8959	48.81%	9396	51.19%
2021	9768	50.88%	9429	49.12%
2022	10117	52.18%	9272	47.82%

**Table 1.** Number and percentage of open access and not open access New Zealand outputs

## Literature review

There is a paucity of literature related to how Māori researchers engage with the open-access publishing environment, with these issues only being covered in reports in grey literature published by CONZUL (2021, 2022), Saunders (2022), Henk (2019), and White and Remy (2017). These reports reveal low levels of understanding and uptake of open access publishing opportunities, with a reluctance to use gold open access routes and limited understanding of green open access options. The reports demonstrate that these practices are not only restricted to Māori researchers. The literature on Māori experiences of academic publishing reveals the impact New Zealand's PBRF research assessment process has had on Māori research. Roa et al. (2009) identified fourteen problems stemming from the PBRF process that had impacted on Māori research, with seven of these relating to the publication, dissemination and peer recognition aspects of the evaluation exercise and the academic or research behaviour expected of Māori researchers to obtain higher quality scores. The authors' concerns centred on the pressure that Māori researchers were under to produce scholarly outputs, which weren't always going to be of benefit to those who were subjects of the research but were within the '*publish or perish*' mentality existing in international university systems. This is a similar concern to that expressed by Tawhai, Pihera, and Bruce-Ferguson (2004), who were concerned that the PBRF assessment gave too much weight to the degree of international recognition kaupapa Māori research received, rather than the value it had to local iwi (tribal community) who commissioned or participated in the research project.

The wider international literature on Indigenous researchers' experiences of open access publishing demonstrates that the pressure to publish is also impacting Indigenous scholars. Bryant and Thomas (2024) reveal in their study that black, indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) faculty have become more aware of the open access opportunities available to them but are still facing challenges due to exclusionary practices at their institutions. Berger (2021) and Masaka (2018), both point towards the use of open access as another way Western research dominates and obscures the impact of Indigenous research in Africa and other parts of the global south. Smith et al. (2021) confirm the dominance of open access publishing by authors from high-income countries, with APC costs being a barrier for researchers from the global south.

## Methodology

A kaupapa Māori approach was utilized to understand how Māori researchers and Māori subject librarians engage with the scholarly publication process, identify how and where researchers decide to publish, and consider the role that Māori librarians have in advising them about the options available, including in the open publishing space. Kaupapa Māori methods are emancipatory, having been derived from critical theory, and created to provide Māori with the ability to assert their self-determination and demonstrate the validity and legitimacy of Māori traditional knowledge and customs (Smith, 2021). These methods enable participants and researchers to form a strong and trusting relationship based on tikanga Māori (Māori values and

beliefs), mātauranga Māori (Māori cultural knowledge) and a commitment to analysing the resulting data through a lens that is Māori focused. Other critical aspects of kaupapa Māori research include the development of mutual trust, respect, and reciprocity by ensuring that the community is the primary beneficiary from the outcomes. These requirements can at times restrict how and where the researcher is able to share their scholarly outputs from the research, as the community might be reluctant to have the knowledge they have shared disseminated into the public domain.

## Participants

Six researchers and four librarians who identify as Māori were recruited for this project, which is part of a larger project on academic publishing and peer review experiences of Māori researchers. All ten participants are employed in New Zealand universities. The researchers included representatives from early (up to 7 years post PhD), mid (from 8 to 15) and late (15 years and over) career positions. All six were researchers, utilising kaupapa Māori research methodologies, actively publishing in New Zealand and international publications. The researchers came from a mix of disciplines including management, education, history, Māori studies, psychology, and science. The librarians were all highly experienced professionals, responsible for delivering services and resources to university staff and students, including advising researchers about where and how to publish their scholarly outputs.

Following recruitment, each participant was interviewed for up to one hour. Due to restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, only five of the interviews were conducted in person, with Zoom being used for the other five. The early part of the interview was spent on whanaungatanga (relationship building), which entails the interviewer and participants establishing connections and understandings based on cultural and professional experiences. A core part of this process is to identify how the interview is going to be conducted, what use (if any) of Māori protocol will be followed and reiterate the participant's rights in keeping with the university's ethical code. As the interviews involved academics and librarians, a different range of questions was applied to each group. The interviews with academics involved asking participants six open-ended questions aimed at gaining a detailed understanding of their experiences of publishing their research in open and non-open contexts, including their perspective on the advantages and disadvantages of open access journals, and their perceived barriers to publishing in both contexts. The questions for librarians focused on the interactions they have with Māori researchers, including the advice they provide to researchers about publishing, and their perceptions of the awareness Māori researchers have about open access options available to them and different categories that open access consists of.

## Results

The interviews with Māori researchers demonstrated that they all had an awareness of the push to open-access publishing and the contribution it is making in their discipline. However, the results revealed some confusion about the options that open-access publishing provided. There was also a perception that some fully open-access journals were of an inferior quality to those published in print or using a hybrid method. This was voiced as a view that the peer review processes were sometimes not as robust in new open-access journals as those in journals with a longer publishing history. Two of the participants mentioned that they were receiving multiple invitations every week from journals seeking articles or offering them the opportunity to be a guest editor of a special issue. Most of the invitations were from journals that required relatively high APCs. One of these researchers indicated that they checked regularly with library staff to ascertain the validity of their concerns about these journals. The more experienced researchers talked about how the academic publishing landscape had changed over the past decade, from being predominantly print based where there was a substantial delay between items being accepted for publication and their appearance in a print journal, to a situation where their articles were now made available 'online first'; they were mainly happy with this. Questioned further about their understanding of the

differences between diamond, gold, and green options of publishing open access, only two had heard about diamond, while all six could distinguish between gold and green publishing. However, the cost of publishing via gold was seen as a significant barrier, and there was a reluctance to pay an APC unless they had access to funds from their institution or an external funder to cover these costs.

Researchers were all very conscious of the need to ensure that their community participants benefit from their participation in the research, as this is one of the key components of doing research with Māori, and a failure to do this would hinder future research relationships with their communities and a loss of mana (status). However, all were equally aware of the need to be published in highly ranked journals so they could meet the quality expectations of their institutions. This need was also linked to improving their academic promotion prospects, which meant they would target a journal with a high ranking and worry about issues like providing open access afterwards. Consistently publishing in high-ranking publications was seen as a personal achievement and this would see their mana within academia grow immensely, but it was felt that this came after ensuring they had contributed back to the communities involved in their research.

As journal articles are written for an academic audience, there was also a belief they were not always the best way of communicating with their participants, and researchers would find alternative means of reporting back to these communities. One indicated that whenever possible they would organise hui (meetings) with her communities, so they could provide a summary of the results of the research and work with those present to identify how they could use the results for future advancement.

All six researchers were aware of the option of loading items into institutional repositories. However, it was clear that not all the researchers understood the rules or requirements of publishers related to Green open access and depositing pre-print (before peer review) or post-print (after peer review but before journal formatting occurs). There was also low awareness of the read and publish arrangements that have been negotiated with publishers, with only two of the researchers identifying this as an option they had taken advantage of.

All participants indicated that they liked to publish in New Zealand focused journals when appropriate, but because not all of these were open access, available online or indexed by citation databases like Scopus or Web of Science (affecting ranking), these would not always be their first choice.

Although not a specific focus of this project, the topic of open data was brought up by two of the participants. They mentioned there was increasing pressure for them to make the data they collected available for other researchers to access. They thought this trend was contrary to the principles of accountability they had to their communities, and raised broader issues associated with Māori data sovereignty and protecting data from re-use or misappropriation without the source community being consulted. They also thought it would be difficult to get participants involved in research if this requirement was enforced by journals or scholarly organisations.

Data from the interviews with Māori librarians related to open access issues revealed their willingness to work collaboratively with researchers wanting to identify where and how to publish. They perceived that although their skills and advice were called on by some researchers, many others would benefit from seeking their assistance. It was noted that as Māori liaison librarians they provided services to Māori researchers across many disciplines, so they needed to be highly aware of the complexities of the publishing process across subject areas. Where necessary they would call on the knowledge of other liaison librarians to assist Māori researchers needing specific advice related to their area of expertise. This collaboration often extended to the provision of special information literacy sessions focused on identifying potential publishing options. However, the uptake of these sessions by Māori researchers was often quite low, with an added observation



that advice was normally sought by individual researchers as and when required and not in advance. Although they also perceived that there was an increasing interest in open access options from Māori researchers, uptake was slow but steady. They believed there was much more that could be deposited in the online repositories than was currently the case. The librarians believed this was partly due to misunderstandings about publisher-imposed restrictions and what is permitted, and although they communicated with their academic communities regularly and information is available on their library's website, they were unsure of their impact on increasing use of the library repositories. In all cases, the librarians were also responsible for providing advice about the research process to students doing master's and doctoral research. This advice extended to publishing opportunities, and this was of particular interest to doctoral students wishing to publish articles as the basis for their dissertations. These students were predominantly concerned about the peer review processes and quality rankings of journals, preferring publications with strong reputations and not always understanding there were open-access options available to them that would enable them to make their work more accessible, while not compromising their wishes for robust peer review processes.

## Discussion

Although acknowledging its importance to scholarly communication, it is clear from the interviews that open-access publishing by Māori researchers is still in the development phase. There is an obvious need for more education about the range of open access opportunities available, including how to make the best use of green access options. The cost of gold access is still regarded as a barrier due to low levels of funding being available for this purpose. However, the read and publish agreements that have been negotiated with publishers is an underutilised option taken up by Māori researchers, and librarians need to persist in educating researchers about its benefits. Librarians can also provide additional guidance about the quality of open access-only journals, including the robustness of the peer review processes. It is clear that Māori researchers are conscious of the need for their research to be of primary benefit to their participants, and although open access provides these individuals with free access to articles, there is a recognition that there might be more appropriate methods to communicate research outcomes with these communities. Although there was little focus on issues related to open data, it is an aspect of the research landscape that is becoming more important. Māori researchers in disciplines that expect research data to be openly available will need to consider how these expectations relate to concerns around Māori data sovereignty and the reuse of data without the source community's informed consent.

## Conclusion

Although it is a small study and its results are not generalisable, this paper has demonstrated that there is an increasing focus on open-access publishing within New Zealand's academic institutions. The evidence from this study and the grey literature shows that the uptake of these opportunities has slowly grown over the last seven years. However, it has also shown that although there is interest in making their research more freely accessible, the Māori researchers in this study are not fully aware of how they can take advantage of open access opportunities available to them. This situation could be improved through greater engagement with the services and advice offered by Māori liaison librarians, providing Māori researchers with increased opportunities to fulfil their obligations to their participant communities, and to satisfy the expectations of their institutions.

## Acknowledgements

**Funding:** this research was funded by the Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington Mātauranga Māori Research Fund – (Project Number:410143).

## About the author

**Spencer Lilley** is an Associate Professor in the School of Information Management at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

## References

- Berger, M. (2021). Bibliodiversity at the Centre: Decolonizing Open Access. *Development and Change*, 52(2), 383-404.
- Bryant, T., & Thomas, C. (2024). Black, Indigenous, and Faculty of Color Awareness of Open Access. *College & research libraries*, 85(1), 7-29.
- CONZUL (2022). 5 years of analysing Open Access in Aotearoa: 2017-2021. <https://www.universitiesnz.ac.nz/analysisngopenaccess>
- CONZUL (2021). State of open access in Aotearoa: Year 3. <https://www.universitiesnz.ac.nz/stateofopenaccessyear3>
- Henk, M. (2019). Centring our values: open access for Aotearoa. <https://www.tohatoha.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Open-Access-Report-WEB.pdf>
- Masaka, D. (2018). 'Open Access' and the Fate of Knowledge from Africa: A Theoretical Discussion. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 87(4), 359-374.
- Nature (2024). Publishing options. <https://www.nature.com/nature/for-authors/publishing-options#:~:text=The%20difference%20is%20that%20when,8890.00%2F%2412290.00%2F%E2%82%AC10290.00>
- Pinfield, S., Wakeling, S., Bawden, D., & Robinson, L. ((2020)). *Open Access in Theory and Practice: The Theory-Practice Relationship and Openness*. Routledge.
- Roa, T., Beggs, J. R., Williams, J., & Moller, H. (2009). New Zealand's Performance Based Research Funding (PBRF) model undermines Maori research. *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand*, 39(4), 233-238.
- Saunders, T. (2022). The future is open: Establishing wider open access for research publications in Aotearoa New Zealand. Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor \_ Kaitohutohu
- Mātanga Pūtaiao Matua ki te Pirimia. <https://www.pmcsa.ac.nz/2022/07/15/the-future-is-openintern-report-on-open-access-publishing-in-aotearoa/>
- Smith, A. C., Merz, L., Borden, J. B., Gulick, C. K., Kshirsagar, A. R., & Bruna, E. M. (2021). Assessing the effect of article processing charges on the geographic diversity of authors using Elsevier's 'Mirror Journal' system. *Quantitative Science Studies*, 2(4), 1123-1143.
- Smith, L. (2021). *Decolonizing methodologies: research and Indigenous peoples*. Zed Books.
- Tawhai, V., Pihera, K. & Bruce-Ferguson, P. (2004). Does the PBRF need reshaping? A new Māori educational institution's perspective. *Research and Development in Higher Education: Transforming knowledge into wisdom: holistic approaches to teaching* 27, 333-340.
- White, R. And Remy, M. (2017). University of Otago Open Access Publishing Survey Results Special version for the Ngāi Tahu Research Consultation Committee <https://ourarchive.otago.ac.nz/handle/10523/7333>

## Appendix

### Glossary of Māori Terms

Hui	Meetings
Iwi	Tribal community
Kaupapa Māori	Māori methodological and theoretical approach to research
Mana	Status (related to a person)
Māori	Indigenous people of New Zealand
Mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge
Tikanga Māori	Māori customary values
Whanaungatanga	Relationship building