

THE PRESENT AND FUTURE GROWTH OF SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

While scholarly publishing in Africa is still struggling to keep pace with the rest of the world, major progress has already been made. Many universities in Africa are seriously engaged in scholarly publication in both print and electronic formats. The output of research is constantly disseminated through universities that plan and hold conferences and seminars, with the presentations then published as proceedings or in peer-refereed scholarly journals. The various initiatives of universities and departments in African universities have provided researchers with opportunities to present their findings in various scholarly journals that are published in universities or through collaborations with various publishing houses. Scholarly publishing is an indispensable avenue for the dissemination of research findings from Africa, adding significantly to a vast body of knowledge whose main contributors are predominantly of western origin. The advent of electronic publishing has widened the scope for African researchers to publish their work. Most African universities maintain pages on their websites that upload research findings, albeit with a number of problems. The uploaded material, from research proceedings to published work, contributes to the visibility of African research in the world. Scholarly journal publishing hence has the potential to encourage research in Africa.

Key words: Scholarly publishing, Africa, universities, scholarly journals

INTRODUCTION

The world is in the information era, a knowledge society that is the result of a swift change from a labour-driven economy to a knowledge-driven economy. However, scholarly publishing in Africa is still struggling to keep up with the rest of the world. This is an obvious threat to the growth of Africa's economies.

RESEARCH IN KENYAN UNIVERSITIES

Most higher institutions of learning are still largely dependent on print resources as access points to knowledge resources. During UNESCO's 29th World Conference on Higher Education in 2009, the then South African Minister for Higher Education and Training, Dr. Nzimande, said that African universities are essentially consumers of knowledge produced in developed countries. The former are the producers and the latter the consumers of knowledge, which seriously undermines fostering multiculturalism in higher education as virtually all partnerships, are one-sided. This demonstrates that universities in Africa are contributing an insignificant amount of scholarly writing in comparison to developing countries. The number of journals and books produced annually by African researchers is still very low.

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George Magoha, the vice chancellor at the University of Nairobi, stated that research output is regarded as an important yardstick for measuring the success of academic institutions. It is hard for Kenyan universities to support research work because most of them are severely constrained by lack of funds - most research activities depend on donor support. However, Kenyan universities are making progress by increasing allocation to their research kitty using internally generated funds. The University of Nairobi has in particular intensified collaboration with local and international partners, which has resulted in a substantial increase in the available research grants.

Moi University also has research units that collaborate with researchers within and outside the university. The Moi University Act gives the university the mandate to carry out research projects that are expected to maintain strong relationships with communities, conform to Kenya's broad national objectives, supplement teaching, and solve problems of the rural communities.

The university sets aside funds under its research grant which are awarded on a competitive basis. The fund, however, fails to satisfy demand, which forces researchers in the university to seek support from other sources. The research results are disseminated through field days organized by the projects, at stakeholders meetings, at symposia and during the Moi University Annual International Conference. The university will be holding its 6th International conference in September 2010 where research findings from researchers across the globe will be presented. All the research activities at the university are coordinated, monitored and evaluated by the University Research Committee under the office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Extension). Between 2005 and 2010, the university has organised eight international conferences and symposia that resulted in research findings being presented and published in various journals or conference proceedings.

The university has ten scholarly journals that are published in schools. These are in the following schools: Arts and Social Science, Business and Economics, Education (2), Environmental Studies, Human Resources Development, Information Sciences, Law, Medicine, and Natural Resource Management. Although the said journals suffer from the 'visibility syndrome' (lack of visibility), as is the case with most African universities' journals, efforts have been made to attract papers from researchers outside Moi University and to list them on the university website to improve visibility. Frequency is another major problem that faces the publication of these journals. This problem has been contributed by the insufficient funds allocated to schools for the publication of journals.

Efforts have been made by the university to set aside funds for research purposes. The university allocates 3 % of its tuition collection from the privately sponsored students programme (PSSP) to research. This fund covers all research activities including annual international conferences, symposia, journal publication, research grants and conference attendance. From this fund, schools are allocated KShs 500, 000 (approximately US\$ 6,250 – exchange rate KShs 80 to one dollar) to be competitively awarded to researchers in a school on an annual basis. Another one to the tune of KShs 250,000 (approximately US\$ 3,125) is given to schools as seed money to start scholarly journals. Such seed

money is provided to start the journal, market it and hopefully sustain it after the first volume and first issue. A further KShs 100,000 (approximately US\$ 1,250) is allocated to schools for international conference attendance on an annual basis. This amount is assumed to be sufficient to fund all travel for about ten or more scholars in a school per year, although in fact it may not even be enough to fund one scholar for a return trip to Uganda or Tanzania (Kenya's neighbours).

Maseno University's research activities are co-ordinated by the office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor in charge of Planning, Research and Extension Services (DVC-PRES). The university has established a centre within the office of DVC (PRES), the Centre for Research and Technology Development, whose main role is to enhance the capacity to undertake research and technology development and to handle research activities. The university also organises conferences, seminars and workshops where research findings are presented. The university is also one of the focal institutions for the implementation of the Kampala-based Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA) research programme on the Lake Victoria Region (VicRes).

Research activities at the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology are administered by the office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor in charge of Research, Production and Extension. The university has a host of scholarly journals listed by AJOL. The university has demonstrated its ability to attract substantial amount of research funds from outside the university through collaborations.

SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING IN AFRICA

Scholarly publishing in Africa can best be described by comparing publications in various countries on the continent (see Table 1).

Table 1: Scholarly publications in some selected countries in sub-Saharan Africa, 2000 - 2007

Country	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
South Africa	4609	4732	5049	4974	5394	5657	6305	1077	37797
Nigeria	884	746	854	855	926	1223	1269	204	6961
Kenya	578	597	666	694	662	684	843	159	4883
Tanzania	253	235	271	316	322	370	473	80	2320
Cameroon	209	216	263	292	332	344	425	69	2150
Ethiopia	244	216	275	300	312	302	333	58	2140
Uganda	191	203	188	244	310	304	382	119	1941
Zimbabwe	263	256	269	251	216	242	234	44	1775
Ghana	198	194	208	206	239	261	305	53	1664
Senegal	202	182	176	239	209	247	224	40	1519
Eritrea	142	147	155	146	153	148	156	35	1082
Benin	134	110	135	126	156	168	216	38	1083
Botswana	129	128	156	135	143	148	186	29	1054
Malawi	132	124	132	132	143	148	167	30	1008

Source: Thompson Scientific, May 2007

In the 21st century, scholarly publishing should promote knowledge dissemination. Ondari Okemwa (2007) states that scholarly publishing should support knowledge and capacity development and notes that low scholarly publication in Africa limits knowledge generation and diffusion. Publishers in Africa, however, seem very much engaged in

publishing textbooks. In other words, publishing in Africa is largely devoted to supporting the passing of school and professional exams. More of the same books covering the same subjects are published in Africa annually. Publishers have ignored key questions that face the continent (Adebowale, 2001). AJOL currently has 388 journals of various subjects published across the continent (AJOL, 2010). Over 5107 issues have been published. However, some of the 388 journals are not up to date in publication, meaning that frequency of publication is a challenge. In 2009, AJOL had hosted over 370 African-published, peer-reviewed journals from 28 countries, accessed by over 100,000 researchers from all over the world, enabling it to accomplish its aim of increasing scholarly communication on the African continent and with the rest of the world.

Notably, although South Africa leads in scholarly publishing in Africa, it has shied away from uploading its journals on AJOL. This has denied many African scholars the opportunity to access research findings and scholarly input from South Africa (see Table 2).

Table 2: Number of journals per country

Country	No. of Journals
Algeria	2
Benin	2
Botswana	2
Burkinafaso	2
Cameroon	6
Congo DR	1
Cote D'ivoire	4
Egypt	11
Eritrea	1
Ethiopia	17
Ghana	19
Kenya	24
Lesotho	1
Madagascar	1
Malawi	3
Libya	1
Mauritius	1
Nigeria	168
Senegal	7
South Africa	1
Sudan	72
Swaziland	3
Tanzania	14
Togo	1
Tunisia	1
Uganda	9
Zambia	2
Zimbabwe	10

Source: African Journal OnLine (AJOL) - 2010 June/website URL

TECHNOLOGY AND SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING

Electronic technology has facilitated the broad, swift and convenient communication of research, offering authors the promise of increased visibility, flexibility, storage, and

access to their work. Today, scholarly information is increasingly digitized. Almost everyone involved in the knowledge production process prefers the electronic format. Digitization has revolutionized the way knowledge is produced and disseminated to the end user, usually in a fast, timely and efficient way. Although authors, publishers and librarians are all motivated by different factors, they agree that the electronic medium hastens the knowledge production process. In libraries for instance, it has changed the way the librarian acquires, processes, stores and delivers information to users. Electronic publishing has been gaining ground in recent years and is now a recognized aspect of the digital world. In the process, it has changed the roles of researchers and publishers.

CHALLENGES FACING SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING IN AFRICA

There are many challenges facing scholarly publishing in Africa, including low literacy levels, poverty, poor technological infrastructure and a shortage of national policies, particularly those focusing on information dissemination and financing the information sector.

Low literacy levels and poverty

Scholarly publishing in Africa is hindered by low literacy levels. In some countries, literacy levels are as low as 10 %. Poverty is therefore perhaps a more serious challenge than most because of the number of people that live below the poverty line. Even the minority that live above the poverty line use most of their income to purchase basic needs – food, shelter, clothing and basic education. Consequently, the market for scholarly works is very small. In Kenya, for example, literacy levels are high, going well over 60 %. However, most Kenyans have low incomes and a poor reading culture. These issues are not supportive of a market for scholarly works.

Technology

The most pressing problem is the need to maintain the technology for traditional printing in scholarly publishing while at the same time investing in and developing a new system that relies on digital creation, transmission and distribution. The costs of doing both things simultaneously are enormous, both to scholarly publishers and to research libraries. The presence of the Internet in sub-Saharan Africa is extremely low. This has made Africa lag behind in terms of scholarly publishing. There is also a need to build the capacity of editors and designers. Access to ICT facilities is also a pressing need for most publishing institutions.

Marketing and distribution

The available scholarly works in Africa are poorly distributed, barely marketed and hardly accessible. For example, it is easier for a librarian in Africa to find out what books have been published on a given topic in Britain than it is to locate relevant titles published on the African continent. Bibliographic resources have not been developed well enough to enable access to African material.

Information policies

Most African countries have no policies on managing information, whether in print or in electronic format. Most government agencies are still operating in a paper based

environment, and many of these countries are still struggling to even make the policy decision to move to an electronic environment. It is only recently in Kenya, through the passing of a Communication Act in parliament, that electronic communications such as email and short messaging (SMS) through the mobile have been recognised as binding contracts or as official communication.

Financial constraints in libraries

Higher education institutions in Africa have been cutting down on funds allocated to their libraries, particularly those for book and periodical subscriptions. This trend has affected most areas of library operations, including the preservation and maintenance of scholarly information material. The training of library personnel to gain knowledge of the new technologies used in modern libraries has been another casualty in the process.

As mentioned earlier, most African people also have very limited disposable income. Altchback (1975) says that even academics, who feature near the top of the income ladder, have difficulty in purchasing scholarly books and journals.

Market

The development of permanent and sustainable local capacity is necessary if the publishing of scholarly works is to succeed. Publishers on the continent should improve their marketing strategies for scholarly works in order to increase the market for their products. There is also an urgent need to improve and expand existing technological infrastructure so that publishers can use the Online Access System to publish and publicize their publications. Through such efforts, Africa will no longer be scholarly marginalized on the globe.

According to INASP (2006), the geographical distribution of document delivery orders of AJOL articles shows that the majority were sent to less developed countries in Africa, Asia, and Central and South America. This is a clear indication that African published scholarly materials have a market outside Africa if their visibility is improved through electronic publishing.

Changes in scholarly communication

According to Ondari-Okemwa (2007), the communication of scholarly findings is done through attendance at conferences that are organised by institutions of higher learning in various regions, and scholars should do everything possible to attend such conferences. Attendance at such conferences allows scholars to understand the current paradigms in their various areas of research.

Poor understanding of changes in the communication of scholarly publications is another big challenge. There is a growing sense of urgency about the need to promote a better understanding of emerging communication systems and also embracing them. This would promote a shared vision of the future beginning with what scholarly publishing entails today and what changes are needed for it to succeed in the future.

THE FUTURE OF SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING

Scholarly publishing in Africa should be encouraged by universities and governments taking a keen interest in research and the dissemination of research findings. The global ranking of universities has consistently shown that African universities are ranked at the bottom. Although such results may be disputed, they indicate that the output of research in Africa is not disseminated or African scholars never engage in research. There is a need to disseminate research findings to a global audience in a visible medium.

Universities in Africa and more so in Kenya, must increase the funds allocated to research and the dissemination of findings. The funds allocated should not only fund the activity of research, but should also promote activities that are used to disseminate findings. Attending conferences, seminars and symposia in some African universities is often viewed as a waste of time and money, and is hence regarded as a low priority area for fund allocation. This needs to change and be seen as an opportunity by African universities to increase their visibility on the global stage and showcase their contribution to scholarly work.

Universities should allocate more money to organising conferences, seminars and other forums where research findings are shared. Such meetings should not only target researchers within a particular country, but also international scholars. In this information age, universities can use the limited resources at their disposal and advertise their conferences through postings on their websites. The proceedings of such conferences should also be published and disseminated to the widest possible audience.

Published scholarly materials from African scholars have been largely invisible to the global audience, save for works emanating from South African universities. Although some universities produce large quantities of research material in terms of theses and dissertations, there is no evidence in terms of visibility outside the gates of these universities. It is therefore necessary to post most of these research findings on the websites of universities and to encourage the extraction of major findings and their presentation during conferences, or sending them for publication in journals in countries other than where the research was done.

To further increase visibility, there is a need to improve Internet connectivity in African universities. A deliberate effort should be made to increase Internet connectivity with high bandwidth in universities in Africa and enable the upload of published works to increase visibility. As mentioned earlier, the use of Internet postings would reduce the amount of money required for the dissemination of research findings. A number of conferences organised by various universities, particularly in Kenya, have published their proceedings in hard copy with limited circulation. With web publishing, these same conferences would reach more audiences and hence increase visibility. This should also apply to the publication of scholarly journals that have limited visibility. As indicated earlier in this paper, some African universities publish journals that are not even known by some scholars within the same university. It is therefore important for such journals to be listed and for their abstracts be posted on universities' websites. It is also important for

their frequency to be maintained, and in order for this to happen, more articles need to be attracted from scholars outside the university. This can only happen if the visibility of the journal is addressed.

Universities in Africa should strive to utilise a university press if there is one existing in a university. If there is no university press, there should at least be a publishing office within the library section. According to Bonn (2007), the University of Michigan became involved with scholarly publishing in 2001 in order to develop lower cost publications and scalable mechanisms for publishing online and distributing the journals and other digital scholarly material. This enabled the university to produce 40 publications as at 2007, most of which were open access (OA). If African universities adopt the same approach, they would produce publications at a lower cost, and even more so if their in-house publishing, production and distribution is by electronic format.

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