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Editorial

Who is to Blame for the Dearth of Viable Local Journals in Africa? A Desperate Call

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“So who cares if all the local journals in Africa extinct?”

Generally, there is an assertion that Africa as a continent provides the world with relatively small research output. This perception seems valid since Africa accounts only for 2 % of the global research output (Moahi, 2012). Furthermore, most of these studies are published in foreign journals by African authors. This practice is due to several reasons. Firstly, some researchers prefer foreign journals to local ones due to the perceived prestige of publishing abroad (Alemna, 1996). Secondly, they choose foreign journals because of their swift review process, and high visibility through international abstracting and indexing (Tarkang, Bain, 2019). Although these factors may seem harmless to the average African researchers and academics, they may affect the degree of quality manuscripts submitted to existing local journals and journal viability rate in Africa.

Another factor worth noting regarding the high mortality of local African journals is the gloomy financial status of journals. Like the case of the Journal of Advocacy, Research and Education (JARE) which was established in 2014 with donor funds (Sarfo, 2018), African journals often function solely on donor support, “with no income or revenue” (Clobridge, 2014: 7). The only benevolent offers they get from institutions like their host universities include “office space, office equipment, telephones, or internet access” (Clobridge, 2014: 7). As this “cashless status” persists for many of these local journals, their failure to thrive may become inevitable.

Furthermore, the “cashless status” of many African journals worsen with the fact that many of these African journal publishers feel obliged to publish print versions in addition to online versions. Though this process is expensive, African respondents in Clobridge’s (2014) study indicated that print is often preferred due to “requirements (or preferences) by university libraries, readers, and promotion committees at universities” (P. 7).

Again, local journals face scarcity of quality manuscript submissions due to the policy demands of African universities to encourage researchers and academics to publish in high Impact Factor to earn promotions (Clobridge, 2014). Other local publishers due to systemic challenges like financial strains and difficulty in obtaining reviewers take too long to complete reviews. Hence, African researchers and academics are literally pushed away to submit their papers to foreign journals who appear more effective in terms of publishing standards (Tarkang, Bain, 2019).

To an extent, we as Africans are to blame for the dearth of viable local journals in Africa. African authors, publishers, and academic institutions all play subtle and obvious roles in making

local African journals less viable over the years. Until we learn as Africans to fix these gaps by accepting our local journals as authors and adopting effective publishing standards as publishers, our local journals will not survive the test of time. As the future looks murky for local African journals, many of these journals will struggle to publish high-quality and relevant studies to meet this unending pressure if nothing is done by Africans (Tarkang, Bain, 2019).

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