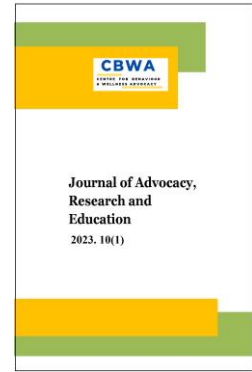




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Editorial

Artificial Intelligence Chatbots, High-Tech Plagiarism, and Academic Publishing Integrity Conundrum: Are Local Journals in Africa Ready?

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence chatbots are one of the innovative examples of machine learning technology today. The inception of this technology has escalated several discussions on high-tech plagiarism in academic publishing. As the world gets overwhelmed with issues regarding academic integrity, an important task facing local African journals is “How equipped are their systems to ensure academic publishing integrity in the face of high-tech plagiarism?” This question demands a multifaceted call to action and a serious look at the current challenges facing local journals.

Keywords: Academic Publishing Integrity, African-Based Journals, Artificial Intelligence Chatbots, High-Tech Plagiarism.

1. African Journals’ Woes

In one of my earlier editorials, I raised a rhetorical question, “*So, who cares if all the local journals in Africa are extinct?*” (Sarfo, 2019, p.3). It was clear in that paper that the challenges faced by African journals are multidimensional and may face extinction if not attended to with urgency. Over the years, Africa as a continent has been noted to provide a relatively small research output of approximately 2 %. Overall, the continent is also known to produce 0.1 % of all global patents (Gurib-Fakim, Signé, 2022). Among the fundamental challenges facing African journals is poor funding (Gurib-Fakim, Signé, 2022; Sarfo, 2019). Over the years, African governments have invested less in science and research than other continents (Gurib-Fakim, Signé, 2022). With this little investment into local journals, the important role played by African journals in the global research space can not be felt (Gurib-Fakim, Signé, 2022; Sarfo, 2018a; Sarfo, 2019).

The African Journals Online (AJOL), a well-known indexing for African-published scholarly journals, indicates on its website over 690 Journals from 39 Countries (The African Journals Online, 2023). Notwithstanding this growing number of African journals, most academics prefer foreign journals due to several reasons. These reasons include the prestige of publishing in well-known journals outside the continent (Alemna, 1996), the fast review process, good publishing

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standards, and great visibility through abstracting and indexing (Sarfo, 2019; Tarkang, Bain, 2019). According to Sarfo (2019), as harmless as the choice to publish in top-tier journals whose publishers are well-established outside the African continent, it adversely affects the number of quality papers these African researchers and academics submit to local journals.

Additionally, most vibrant African journals are usually cashless and have no assets. As Clobridge (2014) indicated, these journals rely solely on donor support and often generate no income or profits. The only benefits they get from host institutions are “office space, office equipment, telephones, or internet access” (Clobridge, 2014: 7). Besides, the financial challenges experienced by many African journals are exacerbated by the choice to produce print versions of publications instead of online. Despite the considerable cost involved, Clobridge’s (2014) study revealed that print editions are often favoured by African university libraries, readers, and the expectations of university promotion committees. Furthermore, local journals struggle with a shortage of high-quality manuscript submissions due to policy directives of African universities that encourage researchers and academics to publish in journals with high-impact factors to secure promotions and improve university rankings in the global arenas (Clobridge, 2014; Sarfo, 2019). Certain African publishers, constrained by systemic obstacles such as financial limitations and resources, struggle to obtain reviewers, often leading to a delay in completing manuscript reviews. Thus, they end up being perceived as less efficient in adhering to publishing standards compared to foreign publishers (Tarkang, Bain, 2019).

2. Artificial Intelligence Chatbots, High-Tech Plagiarism and Academic Publishing Integrity Challenge: Way Forward for African Journals

Artificial intelligence-powered chatbot technology has been a major topic of discussion in academia and scholarly publishers regarding its usefulness and challenges. The issue of abusing or misusing these artificial intelligence-powered chatbots to commit high-tech plagiarism is a major concern. High-tech plagiarism involves using sophisticated artificial intelligence technology to engage in plagiarism. However, a major concern in research and scholarly publishing is that detecting high-tech plagiarism is difficult since these internet-based tools can use machine learning algorithms to create manuscripts or content without authorisation. Also, the legitimacy of such content is sometimes questionable, as exhibited in a paper by King and ChatGPT (2023). Notwithstanding the gains brought in by this technology, its existence and future expansion to African-based publishers and journals will compound their existing challenges. Despite potential resource constraints, African journals require a thoughtful and adaptable approach to ensure the highest academic publishing integrity.

To tackle this growing high-tech plagiarism and uphold the integrity of academic publishing, African journals and publishers/host universities should establish comprehensive training programmes on scientific and scholarly writing within higher education institutions. One such popularly shared and effective approach is the “DRAFT” strategy to fight plagiarism by Sarfo and Asiamah (2016) and further refined by Sarfo (2018b). The practical strategy, whose DRAFT abbreviation is ‘**D** – Diligent attitude’, ‘**R** – Referencing proficiency’, ‘**A** – Academic writing skills’, ‘**F** – Faithful in Academic Writing Ethics’ and ‘**T** – Time management skills.’ Such initiatives will help researchers and academics maintain academic integrity in research endeavours.

Furthermore, there is a need to increase African governmental funding, donor agencies, and institutional support for African-based journals to improve their integrity practices and peer-review quality standards. This support will also help African-based journals acquire plagiarism detection software licenses and training materials to support their work. Also, publishers in Africa should begin forging partnerships with organisations like universities, research institutions, and other tech industries that provide access to resources and expertise in high-tech plagiarism detection.

3. Conclusion

The fight to enhance the quality of African-based journals is an urgent and worthy call. The emerging challenge of dealing with artificial intelligence chatbots and high-tech plagiarism will compound these journals’ existing difficulties. Nevertheless, African governments, universities, publishing organisations, donor organisations and other stakeholders must support initiatives supporting academic publishing integrity and the publication of quality research outputs in local journals.

4. Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials

Not applicable.

Conflict of interest statement

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