Journal publishing in Africa

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Introduction

Journals are the backbone of scholarly work. They provide a medium through which scholars of all ages can exchange information, be educated and stimulate debate. Journals differ from books in that are much more 'immediate' and can explore current issues. This is particularly important in the field of science, technology and medicine (STM) where scholars are competing to publish new discoveries, patents, cures or ideas. The opportunities and obstacles for producing scholarly journals vary considerably in Africa due to the diverse and complex conditions within African countries. This paper presents a brief overview of the current status of scholarly journals in Africa and then examines the processes involved in running a journal. Journal publishing is also examined from the perspective of the author – how they should choose and write for journals and what their expectations should be.

Historical background

Scholarly journals have been produced for many years on the African continent. A review of periodicals listed in the African Periodicals Exhibit Catalogue (APEX, 1997) shows that as far back as 1884, the *South African Law Journal* was started and in 1902, the first volume of the *Proceedings of the Rhodesia Scientific Association* (now *Transactions of the Zimbabwe Scientific Association*) was produced. Journal numbers have increased with time, particularly from 1980 onwards as information has proliferated, especially in the STM fields. Zeleza (1997) gives an excellent overview of the political and economic forces influencing the production of scholarly journals in Africa, which are strongly tied into the expansion and decline of universities, research institutions and agencies over the past 40 years.

Current status of journal publishing in Africa

Comprehensive lists of current African scholarly journals are maintained by the African Journals OnLine project[1] (AJOL), APEX, the National Library of South Africa's Index to SA periodicals and the Library of Congress, Nairobi Office. The journals cover a broad range of disciplines from STM through humanities and social sciences to law, education and politics. According to the APEX catalogue (1997), circulation numbers for the African periodicals vary from under 100 to more than 16000. The higher circulation numbers are associated with the semi-popular magazines and society/association publications with the true scholarly journals usually having a circulation of less than 500, often in the order of 100 – 200.

A growing proportion of these journals are now online through collaborative national and international projects. At present, much of the online availability is confined to tables of contents and abstracts. However as scholars prefer full text articles, these are becoming increasingly available, albeit at a slower pace of development than the limited content versions. Access to full text articles in African journals was pioneered in 1996 by the Electronic Publishing Trust for Development (EPT)[2] in collaboration with Bioline[3], with 7 journals currently online. Several more journals are coming on stream this year through projects such as INASP's African Journals Online Pilot Project (AJOPP).

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[1] <www.inasp.info/ajol>
[2] <www.epublishingtrust.org>,
[3] <www.bioline.org.br>

One other project of note, was an initiative by the University of Michigan, USA, launched in 2002. Called Project MUSE, it planned to place a number of African journals online, and then to sell this package of online journals to Western libraries. Unfortunately Project MUSE was unable to continue, and folded in early 2003. The reasons given for the closure of the project were that the journals failed to deliver on time, and their unreliability led to a number of claims from the libraries who had purchased the package. The claims were for a refund of monies paid, causing the project to lose money, so it was unable to continue. This was a great shame, but highlights a potential problem for electronic journals: in the online environment late publication is highly visible, and western libraries (in particular) expect regularity of publication – claims for compensation are not uncommon if a journal fails to appear. Therefore, for any project such as this to succeed, the journals must be aware and able to publish regularly.

Usage statistics for print journals are hard to obtain and are often confined to circulation or subscriber numbers as it is difficult to assess how many persons may read each printed copy of a journal. In contrast, usage statistics (internet use) for African journals are currently being compiled by a number of different organizations: these all show that use has definitely increased over the past few years. For example, for AJOL, there were 700 registered users and an access count of 4200 (hits) at the end of September 2000 (INASP, 2000). This is in contrast to January 2003, when there were approximately 81,000 hits per month with over 5400 registered users. The statistics also show where access is from – the majority of the registered users are from the USA, followed by Africa and Europe.

Electronic-only journals
Electronic-only journals (i.e. available only on the internet) are still rare in Africa,. *Science in Africa*[4], Africa's first only-on-line science magazine, started about 3 years ago in South Africa. The magazine seems to be very successful to date, receiving several million hits and being accessed from over 70 countries. The magazine is currently free on-line. Another online-only journal – the African Journal of Biotechnology[5] was launched last year in Kenya – and also appears to be doing well. Each issue is produced on time and the journal is receiving a lot of support from authors. This type of on-line journal may offer some hope to journal publishers struggling with exorbitant printing and distribution costs. However, many scholars in Africa are still not able to view electronic journals (or indeed print journals) and much still needs to be done in order to increase access.

Journal publishing methodology
Starting a new journal may often be easier than try to reorganize or resuscitate older ones as proper mechanisms can be put into place at the start for both the scholastic and the business management of the journal. There is a lot of useful information available on good practices in setting up and managing journals, some specifically for Africa, including books by Zell (1998) and Youdeowei (2002), resources online at INASP, EPT, Bellagio Publishing Network[6] and the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP)[7]. In addition, the proposed African association of editors of scholarly journals (see Hussein 2003 in this volume), and the newly formed Forum for African Medical Editors (FAME) should greatly assist those involved in journal production through networking, training and joint ventures.

Appointment of a competent and dedicated editor is central to the running of a successful journal. Editors of many African journals (in common with many editors in western journals) work on a voluntary basis, trying to juggle the long hours required for being a good editor with their other work

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[4] <www.scienceinafrica.co.za>
[5] <http://www.academicjournals.org/AJB>
[6] <www.bellagiopublishingnet.org>
[7] <www.alpsp.org>

commitments. This may not be possible and something invariably suffers. Paying editors for their work may enable them to put aside more time to the journal, but this is often not possible as few African journals make sufficient revenue to allow for this. Whether voluntary or not, all editors should be supported by a good editorial board which may comprise local as well as international experts in the field of interest. The mission statement of the journal and its target readers should be clearly defined together with marketing strategies and cost recovery systems.

The journal may be produced by a learned society, a research or educational institution, research group or even a commercially-based publisher, if so wished. In developed countries, most journals are published by commercial publishers, even when the journal is owned by an Association or learned society. In this case the owner takes responsibility for the intellectual decisions (content and quality), and the commercial publisher takes responsibility for the practical work (producing the journal, marketing, distribution, etc.). The relationship of the owner and the publisher is a commercial one, based on a split of revenue. This model means that the owner does not need the skills of publishing as their contribution is the intellectual content of the journal. They are able to devolve the responsibility of "publishing" to the commercial publisher, and benefit from their specialist knowledge. This model has not been well explored in Africa.

Once the journal is set up, or reorganized, along the above suggestions, the content of the journal will reflect the quality of submissions that it attracts and the quality of the reviewing process. Journal reputations are hard to build up and quick to be lost. Therefore, journal producers continually need to strive for excellence in order to attract good quality admissions. Peer review is a critical process in journal production and is usually highly valued by authors. However, it is also the process most likely to cause problems in running the journal unless correct mechanisms are put into place at the start, as outlined below.

The journal editing and review process

The journal editor, and the editorial team, are responsible for the quality of content published in their journal, and to ensure this, a formalized system of peer review is usual. This enables papers to be assessed by specialists also working in the same field as the author, and provides feedback and constructive criticism to help the author improve the paper. The three requirements for acceptance are:
1. the subject matter is suitable for the journal;
2. sound principles have been used in the development, research and analysis of the reported work;
3. the article is written in the required style and format for the journal.

There is no common editorial structure or working practice for journals, as they all operate slightly differently. However, a successful structure will not place too much burden on the editorial team, whilst ensuring that papers are fairly and thoroughly reviewed before acceptance. One common structure is as below:

1. Editor-in-Chief: with main responsibility for final acceptance of all material
2. Editorial Panel: a small group who each take responsibility for allocated papers, selection of referees, and for first acceptance/refusal of papers.
3. Editorial board: a large group who undertake reviewing, provide advice to the journal, and are available for comment on selected papers.
4. An administrator: an individual who manages the communication, monitors the progress of papers, and chases late returns, etc. – frequently a secretary working closely with the Editor-in-chief.

A common methodology for reviewing papers is as follows:
1. The manuscript (mss) is sent to the journal by the author
2. The Editor-in-Chief (EiC) quickly scans the paper to see if it should be instantly rejected

3. The EiC allocates a member of the editorial board to deal with the paper (the EiC may deal with some papers him- or herself)
4. The mss is sent to the member of the Editorial Panel
5. The Editorial Panel Member selects referees (from the Editorial board, or externally)
6. The referees are contacted to see if they are available to read the paper
7. The paper is sent to the referees, and they return it
8. The Editorial Panel Member reads the referee reports and makes a decision to accept, reject or send for revision. He/she would usually also read the paper in detail at this point (unless all the referees say it is not worth reading)
9. The Editorial Panel Member then returns the paper to the author for revision, and takes responsibility for ensuring that the revision is undertaken satisfactorily (unless the changes require the paper to be reviewed again)
10. Only when the Editorial Panel Member has decided that a paper should be rejected or accepted is it then sent to the EiC for final approval. Only at this point would the EiC read the paper in depth.

This methodology allows for "distributed responsibility" and avoids over-burdening any member of the editorial team, as no one person is expected to read every paper submitted to the journal.

Referees should be chosen very carefully and must be totally impartial and professional in their review in order to avoid problems caused by rivalry between competing researchers. Ideally there should be at least three referees to give a broad overview of the paper and to allow a decisive yes or no vote as to its publication. However, given the shortage of subject specialists in Africa, many journals may find that two referees is a more practical compromise, with the editor having the deciding vote in any publishing decision. The editorial board should be careful not to overload referees and a rosta should be kept of 'who' referees 'what' and 'when' to avoid this.

It is usual for articles to be sent to the referee with the author's name deleted, and authors are not usually informed of who has reviewed their article. The article is sent to the referees along with review instructions and deadlines, and frequently a review form to fill out (with specific questions such as "does the article present new information"), to assist them with providing a report. They are sometimes offered the opportunity to make confidential comments for the editor only, as well as comments that will be returned to the author.

Production
Once a manuscript has been accepted, it enters the production phase of publishing. This can be done in-house or through commercial services. In-house manuscript preparation can be quicker and less costly but may not be done as professionally unless staff have been fully trained in this aspect. There should be good liaison with the printers at this stage so that manuscripts are prepared in the correct format/software. For online publishing, various items can be added to improve the electronic 'value' of the article, including hyperlinks to datasets, 3-dimensional graphics, colour illustrations, links to reference material etc. Further details on electronic publishing are given in the useful article by Morris (2002).

The final layout can be communicated to the authors as hard copy or by files (usually using portable document format - PDF). The authors will often be given a short period to check for typesetting errors and then asked to return the checked copy for amendment and publishing. Once all corrections are done, the article is now ready for publishing. Material is sent to the printers and/or for electronic distribution. If the journals are being published online through services such as AJOL or Bioline, appropriate material must be prepared and emailed to the service for mounting on the web. Additionally journals can contribute to the Open Access initiative (see Hussein, 2003 this volume) and make their content freely available to the world. Publishers should also ensure that their content is archived with

the national archiving institute in their host country. If the publisher is agreeable, authors may also be able to self-archive their papers immediately, or at an agreed date (i.e. provided this falls within the copyright agreement). This may take the form of self archiving on personal or institutional web pages.

Subediting
One difference between the majority of African journals and those published in the Developed World, is in the use of subeditors (or copyeditors) to read and correct articles once they have been accepted. Most African journals expect their authors to present papers in a ready state for setting into pages, and there are complaints that the standard of English is getting worse, and is affecting the quality of the journals. In most developed world journals, it is accepted that authors cannot be relied upon to write to a good enough standard for publication, and subeditors are employed to read all accepted papers, to ensure that the spellings are correct (and in journal style), that the grammar is correct and that everything is clear, and to check the references, tables and artwork against text citation.

Copyright
Any journal must have the authors' permission to reproduce their work. Although too many journals rely on the simple fact that an author has submitted their article to them, it is becoming increasingly important for the journal to obtain written authorization from the author. This is to avoid potential legal arguments over the assignment of the ownership of an article, but can also protect the journal from other legal threats, such as libel, plagiarism, etc. The most common practice is to require the author to sign a copyright assignment form, which usually contains the following:
1. The rights of the publisher: for example:
   * To reproduce the work within the journal – in any media (print, electronic, or other future media)
   * To reproduce the article for sale (reprints)
   * To assign to another party the right to reproduce and sell the article (Document Delivery services – such as AJOL)
2. The rights of the author: for example,
   * The right to re-use the article for non-commercial reasons (for example during teaching)
3. The author's declaration: for example,
   * Nothing in the article infringes copyright (i.e. they have not reproduced any material within the article without gaining permission to do so)
   * The article has not been printed elsewhere, and is not being considered for publication elsewhere
   * The article does not infringe anyone's rights – for example there is nothing libelous within the article

See the sample copyright form in the Appendix at the end of the book.

An alternative recently introduced in response to criticism from authors is a "License to Publish" form. In this, the author retains copyright in their article, but allows the publisher to print the article within the journal. Practically this does not affect the journal's right to use the article within the journal, but it does mean that the author is free to reprint the article where they wish, and for commercial gain. See the sample License to publish form in the Appendix at the end of the book.

Distribution, invoicing and promotion
Once copies of the journal have been printed, it is important for them to be distributed to the subscribers as quickly and efficiently as possible. There are different methods for distributing printed journals, depending on the recipients and the journal, and frequently include:

- Mailing – this is the most common method of distribution, but is reliant on postage timings, especially for journals being sent to other countries, and can be unreliable;
- Conferences: some journals distribute to members through annual or regular conferences or meetings – this is a very good way to reach people for little cost (and also emphasizes the importance of membership);
- Shops: some bookshops stock and sell journals, but this is not very common outside university bookshops on campus.

In addition to being distributed to paying subscribers (and members of the journal's own society), the journal is often also provided free to a number of individuals and organizations. These may include members of the editorial board, authors, archiving bodies and other legal deposit organizations. The names of these individuals (who may change with each issue) and their current address, must be maintained with scrupulous accuracy, as it is important that the journal is not only sent to the right people at the right address, but must not be sent to people who no longer subscribe.

Journals make different charges for subscriptions, often charging different rates for individuals and organizations; for subscriptions within the journal's own country, or international; in different currency, and for different periods (maybe offering one year's subscription, or a discounted 2-year subscription). This all adds to the complexity of keeping accurate subscription records, and recording invoices sent, and payment received. In addition, some journals need all financial transactions to go through their institution Finance department, which may add an extra level of complexity (and charges to the journal).

It is – unfortunately – not uncommon for African journals to have poor records and working practices when dealing with subscribers, invoicing and payments. This may be due to a number of different reasons, but one common theme is the lack of finance, and the perception that distribution and managing subscriptions is of lower importance than the intellectual content of the journal. The price of most journals is very low, and in some cases may not even cover the bank charges incurred when processing foreign subscription payments. The cost of staff time to record, chase and manage payments takes low priority when the journals are publishing in an environment where revenue from subscriptions is very low – and unfortunately in some cases a vicious circle develops where the revenue is low due to the poor management of this part of the journal process.

Equally, the environment does not lend itself to active promotion of journals, and marketing of journals is often seen as being of low priority. The journal market is quite unusual as both the readers and authors come from the same community, and any promotion of the journal must ensure that it attracts both groups.

Unlike the book market, few journals are sold through shops, and so these cannot be used to promote them. This means that direct mail, conference displays and word-of-mouth are the most important promotional tools available to any journal, and the journal market relies on networking of individuals. Unfortunately the perception of marketing is that it is expensive, and this often deters any plans being developed. It is true that some of the more affluent western journals operate very high profile marketing, with extravagant leaflets, displays, receptions and other gimmicks, but there are lessons that can be learnt by any budget.

Considerations for the author
Deciding in which journal to publish
Choice of journal depends on the target audience i.e. is the paper to be read only by your peers or perhaps by the general public; by national or international readers? The quality and timeliness of the journal may also affect your decision. Currently there is little information on the quality of African

journals, unlike the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) citation indices or other performance indicators used for international journals. The proposed African association of editors may be therefore able to tackle this and introduce some measure of quality amongst the local journals. Choice of journal will also be dictated by the type of article you are writing – a report on current research work, a review, a short note or letter to the editor. Authors should therefore review all the local/international journals available and make an appropriate choice. Some journals may have page charges for accepted articles; for example some journals in AJOL charge US$3 to $20 per page, or have a standard 'handling' fee around US$50, whilst others do not have any charges. However, most journals will agree to waive these charges if the author genuinely cannot afford to pay them.

Preparing the article
Once you have decided on the journal, obtain the "Instructions for authors". This can often be done online (e.g. through AJOL by clicking on "Information about the journal"). Authors can also check current issues of the journal for instructions or can email/write to the editor. Once instructions are received, you must make sure that guidelines are strictly adhered to in terms of layout, formatting, content, referencing etc. If writing the paper as a lone author, get a colleague to check through the article and revise accordingly before sending it off. Alternatively, if working with co-authors, ensure that they all are all satisfied with the final draft before sending it off. Check contact details are up-to-date and assign a corresponding author if necessary.

The importance of clear and detailed 'instructions' cannot be overemphasized. They enable the author to prepare the manuscript exactly as required by the journal and proper instructions should minimize time and effort spent by editors, reviewers and authors in correcting mistakes. The instructions should contain details about the type/content of the articles required, the reviewing process, charges (if at all), time scale for different stages in the process as well as detailed information on layout, formatting, pictures, tables, graphs, formulae, units, spelling and references. Examples of good instructions can be seen from AJOL for journals such as *Insect Science and its Applications* or the *African Anthropology Journal* .

Submitting and completing the article
The paper should be sent to the editor with a covering letter. For those journals using email, authors should be encouraged to submit papers by email, as this really minimizes delays and save postage/paper costs. They should, however, ensure that they receive acknowledgement of the email submission as these can sometimes go 'astray'. Alternatively, if journals do not encourage this practice, submissions must be exactly as shown in the instructions e.g. 3 hard copies plus disc copy. Authors should make a note of when the paper is submitted and make sure that the editor acknowledges receipt. The authors should expect impartial and thorough reviewing of their article from the journal. In most cases, they are not given the identity of the reviewer, unless the latter has agreed. In many cases, peer review improves the quality of the final submission and authors can benefit from input on both the content and the writing of the article. If there are conflicts or problems, the authors should liaise with the editor to resolve these; but final decisions on publishing, of necessity, rest with the journal.

If the authors do not receive feedback after the specified time in the instructions, then they should contact the editor and find out what has happened to the article. Once feedback is received, they should act promptly in rewriting, and later on, in proof reading. No major changes are usually allowed at the proof reading stage and authors should only be identifying minor formatting/typesetting problems for correction. After final submission, authors will often be informed of expected publication date and number of authors' copies expected.

Conclusion

Scholarly journals have been produced, with varying degrees of success, for more than 100 years in Africa. These journals cover a broad range of disciplines and are circulated by hard copy and/or electronically. Electronic distribution has dramatically increased access to journals within Africa and externally and has broadened the use of African scholarship. There is a lot of valuable information and resources available to those wishing to start or reorganize a scholarly journal in Africa. Key essentials in producing a successful journal include a clear mission statement, appointment of a proficient and dedicated editor, an active editorial board and sound marketing and business management. The review process should be carefully and punctually managed by the editor to ensure both reviewers and authors are not prejudiced. Conversely, authors should select the journals in which they publish with care, prepare manuscripts as instructed and maintain good contact with the editor during the processing of their manuscript. If all players in the journal 'chain' work together, African journals can improve in quality and quantity and increase the flow of knowledge both within and out of Africa.

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