

Scholarly Publishing in Nigerian Universities: The Ibadan University Press Experience

**Adedapo AA and Adedapo AP
University of Ibadan
Ibadan, Nigeria**

Introduction

Scholarly publishing in this century, compared to the situation up to the late 1970s, with its concomitant and index of scholarly research in Nigeria, has declined in terms of output, quality and regularity of publications. The effect of this decline became worrisome with the fall in the standards and funding of education which were brought about by the then prolonged military rule. Underdevelopment, inability and unwillingness of the government to give quality leadership deepened the decline experienced by scholarly and academic publishing in the nation. The preoccupation of most Nigerians became the problems of daily existence following the virtual collapse of the currency (the Naira) due to corruption, mismanagement and misappropriation of funds by the country's military rulers and their civilian collaborators. This state of affairs generated the "brain drain" syndrome, and led to discouragement, disillusionment and despair among those mired in the dismal conditions in the country. Academics were distracted from their primary assignments of teaching, research and supervision of students' research, and were made to dissipate energy confronting official neglect and wrong-headed policies. This explains the spate of seemingly endless strikes for a better academic environment since 1981. In the meantime, long established reputable journals and academic publishers had collapsed taking a heavy toll on academic publishing in Nigeria.

The Ibadan University Press is a premier academic publishing outfit whose mandate is to assist the University of Ibadan scholars with the publications of books, inaugural lectures and university lectures. Of recent, the press has been active in collaborating with authors in the publishing of their works and shared financing, as well as marketing of these books. In this paper, the authors seek to find an avenue for improved collaboration and the possibility of government agencies and parastatals in Nigeria; non-governmental organizations and other foreign bodies coming to the aids of these academics. This way, the persistent and current crisis in publishing may be brought to a halt.

Ibadan University Press also called the Publishing House was established in 1949. The Press was established because the University of Ibadan found it inconvenient to rely on the outside jobbers to satisfy its needs of rebuilding old journals and books, as well as producing and building new ones. The Publishing House was conceived as a scholarly press to publish learned journals, scholarly monographs and works of social import which commercial publishers would consider unprofitable to publish. Apart from these, this Press also publishes such books as are likely to generate revenue without detracting from its academic orientation.

The Economic Crisis of the 1980s and Its Impact on Academic Research and Publishing

By the early 1980s, Nigeria had entered a period of economic crisis, culminating in the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of 1986. One of the immediate consequences of this was the steady and calamitous devaluation of the currency (the Naira) which began to yield ground to the US dollar. The exchange rate plunged from a height of N1 to US 65 cents in 1979 to N35 to US\$ 1 by the late 1980s. Today, the ratio is one dollar to N175 in the black market! Another consequence of the economic depression was the general neglect of tertiary education and the specific marginalization of courses or subjects which were not considered directly relevant to the nation's quest for technological development. This entailed, on the one hand, a deliberate recruitment of some of the most articulate scholars and critics into top government positions (as ministers, advisers and ambassadors), and on the other hand, a series of repressive policies in dealing with the legitimate demands of academic staff and student unions. Prolonged and intermittent strikes, violent demonstrations and inevitable closures then became the lot of the tertiary institutions.

These crises had a direct impact on academic research and publishing. First, many outstanding scholars simply fled the country's tottering ivory towers for more stable climes. Second, those who did not leave by choice or lack of it were distracted into pursuits aimed at ensuring their material survival. Some left the academia for business or the private sector which offered greater financial remuneration and material comfort. Still, others simply vegetated as library facilities proved increasingly obsolete and grossly underfunded. Libraries could no longer subscribe to current journals and, consequently scholars could no longer keep pace with developments in their fields. Many dropped out of the race and stopped writing for international journals which

routinely rejected manuscripts that attempted to disseminate outdated concepts and intellectual arguments.

“Publish or Perish:” Coping with the Crisis of Academic Research and Publishing since the 1980s

In the heyday of professional associations and established journals, scholars were assured that participation in their annual congress would guarantee the publication of the best papers. This motivated the production of high quality papers and sustained interest in the association. The economic crisis led to the collapse of many journals published by some professional bodies. The collapse of the Journal was indeed because of benign neglect, although this was in conjunction with others factors.

First, many of the old generation of scholars were now preoccupied with other things, especially, university administration and external politics. Second, they were also involved in the struggle to make ends meet. Third, the collapse of the local currency meant that annual subscriptions could no longer suffice to run the association, much less the journal. Coupled with this was the high cost of printing owing largely to the fact that the paper used was imported.

In the gloomy atmosphere of the last quarter of the twentieth century, scholars based in Nigeria had to take their fate in their own hands. Others concentrated on their teaching, including private coaching as part-time teachers at other tertiary institutions. Those not willing to perish in the academic jungle decided to take some steps. For instance, a number of journals sprouted in departments and faculties in universities across the country. The publication of textbooks for university, faculty or departmental courses was another outlet for publications during this period. This was made possible by the introduction of general courses for university undergraduates sanctioned by the National Universities Commission (NUC). It might be mentioned in passing that the quality of the aforementioned books and journals is variable. Some are products of painstaking scholarship and quality printing while others are slap-dash contraptions aimed at a waiting market, or the deadline for submission of papers for promotion!

The funding of publications is a related issue worthy of attention at this juncture. Owing to the cost of imported paper, publishing of tertiary texts has become an unprofitable enterprise in the absence of a vibrant reading culture in Nigeria's tertiary institutions.

Prominent publishers of tertiary texts, such as Longman, Heinemann, Nelson and Macmillan, simply abandoned the field for the more profitable line— publishing of textbooks for primary and secondary schools with attendant consequences on scholarly publications. In the event, only a handful of publishers still remain in what has become an unprofitable venture. Even so, they publish selectively— texts that have a captive market in certain universities or those that can be launched with fanfare. The latter would be expected to earn enough at the launching to offset the cost of printing, if nothing else. A few university publishing houses still manage to publish tertiary books and journals though without the consistency and prolificacy of earlier times. One of such is the Ibadan University Press.

To be fair, publishers have their own problems which include the prevalence of piracy (in spite of copyrights laws); absence of a national book policy to provide a legal regulatory framework for the industry; low returns on capital; and investors' (and banks') unwillingness to commit their funds to such an enterprise when areas of higher returns exist in the economy. There have also been complaints about the government's inadequate funding of education, professional incompetence within the industry and the poor reading culture in Nigeria.

As might be expected, Nigerian scholars themselves have devised alternative strategies to cope with this crisis. The most popular method is to ask contributors to a book or issue of a journal to contribute towards its production after their papers had been assessed and accepted for publication. The contributors pay sums of money sometimes running into a few thousands of Naira, and receive copies of the journal or book in compensation for their financial contribution towards its production.

It should not be assumed that all scholars based in Nigeria perpetrate sharp practices or evade the due process of peer review and quality research and publishing. As a matter of fact, there are those who publish regularly in leading international journals and who also regularly attend

international conferences within and outside the continent. It would be useful to highlight the strategies adopted by such scholars. One method is to affiliate with specialist research networks and professional associations which fund research and participation in international conferences. Taking advantage of electronic and internet facilities, enterprising researchers access announcements of calls for papers and submit abstracts of papers which, when selected, may qualify them for partial or full support. Participation in such conferences would then depend on the benevolence of the sponsors, the occasional (and limited) support of parent institutions and the individual's personal resources. Membership of or affiliation with some bodies has proved immensely beneficial to Nigerian scholars.

In Nigeria, US, German and French institutions and Foundations give direct material support to academic research. Getting published in leading academic journals is thus a reflection of the quality of the research effort of scholars based in Nigeria.

Recent Development

In partial attempt to ameliorate the crisis facing scholarly publishing in Nigeria, a governmental body, Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), in 2013 came up with some form of help by approving a sum of sixty one million eight hundred thousand naira (₦61.8 million) for the publication of 20 outstanding doctorate theses by converting these to textbooks. The assignment of publishing these books was given to the Ibadan University Press. It is expected that the books would be ready by June 2014.

With this laudable move of TETFund, it has created the record of being the ever parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Education to embark on such a program for the benefit of higher institutions in Nigeria. Also, this action by the Federal Government of Nigeria is commendable because this is the first time money is made available for such PhD theses to be converted to textbooks. There is no doubt that this type of efforts will help resuscitate the publishing of academic journals and serve as encouragements to serious minded academics to publish more intellectual materials.

The Implication of TETFund Intervention

The TETFund intervention stated above has brought to the fore a tripartite relationship that could exist between the funding agencies, the scholars whose works are to be published as well as the Ibadan University Press, the publisher of the works. This could then be further explored to mean that other government and non-governmental agencies or parastatals would have great roles to play in funding scholarly publishing in Nigeria. At this international conference, it is our firm belief that international donor agencies can also be part of this tripartite relationship. It will be a win/win situation. For instance in 2009, the Ford Foundation was at the forefront of resuscitating some university publishing outfits in Nigeria with special focus on capacity building, financing the production of fresh manuscripts, and reproduction of fast selling titles. The Ibadan University Press was also a beneficiary of this gesture and that might have accounted for the choice of this Press in the TETFund intervention. The synergy between the publishers, donor agencies as well as the scholars will impact on education in general as well as help establish an entrepreneurial mindset in the young people who are the direct beneficiary of the scholarly publishing.

It will be recalled that entrepreneurs drive America's economy, accounting for the majority of the nation's new job creation and innovations. According to the U. S. Census Bureau's *2002 Survey of Business Owners*, self-employed individuals who have no paid employees operate three-fourths of U.S. businesses. The United States Small Business Administration reports that America's 25.8 million small businesses employ more than 50 percent of the private workforce, generate more than half of the nation's gross domestic product, and are the principal source of new jobs in the U.S. economy.

Most economists today agree that entrepreneurship is a necessary ingredient for stimulating economic growth and employment opportunities in all societies. In the developing world, successful small businesses are the primary engines of job creation, income growth, and poverty reduction. Therefore, government support for entrepreneurship is a crucial strategy for economic development.

The role played by entrepreneurship in the development of western countries has made the people of developing countries very much conscious of its importance in the programme of rapid economic

development. People have begun to realize that for achieving the goal of development it is necessary to increase both the quantitative and qualitative entrepreneurship in the country. The qualitative entrepreneurship implies the stress on innovating and the quantitative implies the stress on imitating entrepreneurship. Both of them contribute stimulus for development. It is also known that even though a country has resources - labour, technology, capital and raw material etc, but these remain under-explored in the absence of the active and enthusiastic entrepreneurs, who have the ability to organize the various factors of productions.

Nearly 80 percent of would-be entrepreneurs in the United States are between the ages of 18 and 34! A 2005 poll from Junior Achievement (JA) found that 68.6 percent of the teenagers interviewed wanted to become entrepreneurs, even though they knew that it would not be an easy path. In spite of this overwhelming interest, however, youth rarely receive any information about entrepreneurship as a career option.

Entrepreneurship education offers a solution. It seeks to prepare people; particularly youth, to be responsible, enterprising individuals who become entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial thinkers by immersing them in real life learning experiences where they can take risks, manage the results, and learn from the outcomes.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the wider and local contexts of the crisis of academic research and publishing in Nigeria since the last quarter of the twentieth century. It has also highlighted the adaptive and survival strategies of Nigerian academics caught in the web of this crisis. However, in view of the formidable constraints on academic research and publishing in contemporary Nigeria, this paper recommends an action plan that includes the creation of a fund for the publication of tertiary books and journals; provision of special funding for and revitalization of university publishing houses. Nigerian scholars themselves should sustain the tradition of direct involvement in the publication of books and journals to ensure the highest academic quality. In this wise, education will be impacted for good in Nigeria and the young people, the beneficiary of excellent education, will be better for it. This will also set the path for entrepreneurship which is known to drive economic growth even as small businesses are allowed to thrive.

Further Reading

Adedapo AA 2012: The need for entrepreneurial skill in Nigeria of the 21st century. 2nd personality lecture delivered at Kwara State College of Education, Oro, Nigeria (December 3 2012).

Olukoju A 2002: The crisis of research and academic publishing in Nigerian universities: The twentieth century and beyond. 28th Annual Spring Symposium, “African Universities in the Twenty-First Century,” University of Illinois/CODESRIA, Dakar, Senegal, 25-27 April 2002.

United States Department of Labour (Office of Disability Employment policy)

http://www.abilitiesfund.org/programs_and_services/increasing_options_for_entrepreneurs.php