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Development of Institutional and University-Based Journals in Nigeria: Challenges, Prospects, and Strategies for Sustainable Growth

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Abstract: Scholarly journals constitute one of the most important mechanisms for disseminating research findings and advancing knowledge within higher education institutions. Universities, as centres of teaching, research, and community service, depend on quality academic journals to communicate scientific discoveries, promote innovation, influence policy formulation, and contribute to national development. In Nigeria, the establishment of institutional and university-based journals has increased considerably due to the expansion of tertiary education and the growing emphasis on research productivity. These journals have provided platforms for publishing indigenous research that addresses national and regional developmental challenges. However, despite their increasing number, many Nigerian journals remain underdeveloped and have not attained the level of quality, visibility, sustainability, and international competitiveness expected of globally recognized scholarly publications. Challenges such as inadequate funding, weak editorial capacity, ineffective peer-review systems, irregular publication schedules, poor digital infrastructure, low international indexing, inadequate compliance with publication ethics, limited policy support, and researchers' preference for foreign journals continue to impede their development. This paper reviews the concept of Nigerian journals, their various types, significance to higher education, major challenges affecting their development, and practical strategies for strengthening institutional and university-based journals. The paper concludes that sustainable funding, editorial capacity building, digital transformation, adherence to international publishing standards, improved government support, stronger research culture, and strategic international collaborations are essential for repositioning Nigerian journals for global relevance and competitiveness.

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1.0 Introduction

Universities are universally recognized as centres of excellence established for the advancement of knowledge through teaching, research, and community service. These three functions are mutually reinforcing and collectively contribute to national development, economic growth, technological innovation, and social transformation. Among these mandates, research occupies a central position because it generates new

knowledge, develops innovative solutions to societal problems, informs public policy, and strengthens evidence-based decision-making. The quality of any university is therefore closely associated with its research productivity, innovation capacity, and contribution to global scholarship. Research, however, achieves its purpose only when the knowledge generated is effectively communicated to the wider academic community and society. The dissemination of research findings enables other scholars to evaluate, replicate, refine, and apply new knowledge in solving practical problems [1]. Research findings are disseminated through several channels, including conferences, seminars, workshops, technical reports, books, institutional repositories, policy briefs, and scholarly journals. Among these channels, peer-reviewed academic journals remain the most credible and internationally accepted means of communicating scientific knowledge because they subject research findings to rigorous evaluation before publication.

Institutional and university-based journals therefore occupy a strategic position within higher education systems. They provide platforms through which academics publish original research, share innovative ideas, encourage scholarly debate, and contribute to the advancement of various academic disciplines. Beyond serving researchers, journals also support evidence-based policymaking, enhance institutional visibility, improve university rankings, encourage academic collaboration, and preserve scientific knowledge for future generations [2], [3]. In Nigeria, the expansion of universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, and specialized research institutes has resulted in a remarkable increase in the number of institutional and university-based journals. These journals publish research across education, medicine, engineering, agriculture, environmental sciences, law, management, humanities, and the social sciences. They have played an important role in promoting indigenous scholarship and providing opportunities for Nigerian academics to disseminate research findings relevant to the country's developmental needs.

Despite these achievements, journal publishing in Nigeria remains insufficiently developed when compared with established international publishing systems. Many institutional journals face persistent challenges, including inadequate funding, shortage of qualified editorial personnel, weak peer-review mechanisms, irregular publication schedules, poor digital publishing infrastructure, inadequate compliance with publication ethics, limited international indexing, low citation rates, and inadequate institutional and government support. In addition, promotion policies that place greater emphasis on publications in foreign indexed journals have encouraged many Nigerian researchers to submit their best manuscripts outside the country, thereby limiting the growth and international competitiveness of indigenous journals [4]. The underdevelopment of institutional and university-based journals has significant implications for research dissemination, national innovation, university rankings, and the global visibility of Nigerian scholarship. Strengthening local journals has therefore become imperative for promoting indigenous research, improving access to locally generated knowledge, supporting evidence-based policymaking, and enhancing Nigeria's contribution to global scientific literature. Against this background, this paper examines the concept of Nigerian journals, their various types and importance, identifies the major challenges hindering their development, and discusses practical strategies for enhancing the quality, sustainability, visibility, and international competitiveness of institutional and university-based journals in Nigeria [5]. The paper aims to contribute to scholarly discourse on strengthening academic publishing and promoting a more vibrant research ecosystem within Nigerian higher education institutions.

2.0 Conceptual Terms

2.1 Concept of Nigerian Journals

A journal is a periodical publication that contains scholarly articles, research findings, reviews, and other academic contributions subjected to editorial assessment and peer review before publication. Academic journals serve as formal channels for

disseminating new knowledge, promoting scholarly communication, and preserving research outputs for future reference [6]. In the Nigerian context, a Nigerian journal refers to a scholarly periodical published by universities, research institutes, professional associations, government agencies, or private academic publishers within Nigeria. These journals publish original research and scholarly works in various disciplines, including education, medicine, engineering, agriculture, law, management, social sciences, natural sciences, and the humanities. Their primary objective is to advance knowledge, address national development challenges, and provide platforms for Nigerian and international scholars to disseminate research findings.

According to the National Universities Commission (NUC), university journals are important instruments for promoting research culture, enhancing academic excellence, and increasing the visibility of institutional research outputs [7]. Similarly, the Committee on Publication Ethics views scholarly journals as essential mechanisms for ensuring research integrity, quality assurance, and the dissemination of credible scientific knowledge through rigorous peer review. Scholars have also defined journals from different perspectives. Meadows described a scholarly journal as a regularly issued publication designed to communicate original research to members of the academic community. Tenopir and King defined scholarly journals as organized communication channels through which validated research findings are disseminated to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers [8]. These definitions emphasize that journals remain central to knowledge production and academic development.

2.1 Types of Nigerian Journals

1. University-Based Journals

University-based journals are published by universities through faculties, departments, institutes, or research centres. They primarily disseminate research conducted by academics within and outside the institution. Examples include journals published by the University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, Ahmadu Bello University, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and other Nigerian universities.

2. Institutional Journals

Institutional journals are published by research institutes, colleges of education, polytechnics, government agencies, and specialized institutions. They focus on research related to the mandates of their respective institutions. Examples include journals published by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), Nigerian Institute of Medical Research (NIMR), and the National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA).

3. Professional Association Journals

These journals are published by professional organizations and learned societies to promote research within specific professions. They provide platforms for academics and practitioners to share innovations and empirical findings. Examples include journals published by the Nigerian Economic Society, Science Teachers Association of Nigeria, Nigerian Psychological Association, and the Nigerian Academy of Education [9].

4. Open Access Journals

Open access journals provide unrestricted online access to published articles without subscription charges. They increase the visibility, readership, and citation of research findings. Many Nigerian universities have adopted open access publishing to enhance global accessibility of their research outputs.

5. Print Journals

Print journals are published in hard-copy format and distributed physically to libraries, institutions, researchers, and subscribers. Although digital publishing is increasing, some Nigerian journals continue to publish printed editions because of institutional preferences and archival considerations.

6. Electronic (Online) Journals

Electronic journals publish articles through digital platforms using journal management systems such as Open Journal Systems (OJS). Online publishing enables faster manuscript processing, wider dissemination, improved indexing, and easier access for researchers worldwide.

7. Multidisciplinary Journals

These journals publish research articles from multiple academic disciplines. They encourage interdisciplinary scholarship and accommodate a broad range of research topics relevant to national development [10].

8. Discipline-Specific Journals

These journals focus on a single academic discipline such as education, engineering, medicine, agriculture, law, management, economics, or environmental sciences. They provide specialized platforms for scholars within particular fields.

Methodology

2.3 Importance of Nigerian Journals

1. Promotion of Knowledge Generation and Dissemination

Nigerian journals facilitate the publication and dissemination of original research findings. They enable scholars to communicate scientific discoveries, innovative ideas, and policy recommendations that contribute to academic advancement and national development.

2. Promotion of Indigenous Research

Local journals provide opportunities for publishing studies that address Nigerian and African problems, including education, healthcare, agriculture, governance, security, environmental sustainability, and economic development. Such publications ensure that local challenges receive adequate scholarly attention.

3. Enhancement of Academic Career Development

Publications in reputable Nigerian journals contribute significantly to staff promotion, tenure, professional recognition, and career progression within higher education institutions. Academic publications also strengthen researchers' professional profiles.

4. Support for Evidence-Based Policy Formulation

Government agencies, educational planners, policymakers, and development organizations rely on findings published in Nigerian journals when formulating public policies and designing development programmes. Research evidence contributes to informed decision-making and improved governance.

5. Improvement of University Reputation

The quality and quantity of publications produced by university journals enhance institutional prestige, research productivity, and international visibility. Universities with strong journals are often recognized for their contributions to scholarship and innovation.

6. Encouragement of Research Collaboration

Academic journals encourage collaboration among researchers from different universities, disciplines, and countries. Collaborative publications promote knowledge exchange, strengthen research networks, and improve research quality.

7. Preservation of Scientific Knowledge

Journals serve as permanent repositories of scientific knowledge by documenting research findings for future generations. Published articles become valuable references for teaching, learning, policy development, and future investigations.

8. Contribution to National Development

Research findings published in Nigerian journals provide practical solutions to developmental challenges in agriculture, education, health, technology, infrastructure, governance, and environmental management. Consequently, journals contribute directly to socio-economic transformation.

3.0 Result and Discussion on Challenges Militating Against the Development of Institutional and University-Based Journals in Nigeria

Institutional and university-based journals are indispensable to the advancement of higher education because they provide platforms for the publication and dissemination of research findings generated by academics and researchers. Through these journals, universities fulfil their mandate of knowledge creation, preservation, and dissemination. They also contribute to evidence-based policymaking, technological innovation, professional practice, and national development. In developed countries, university journals have become globally recognized sources of scientific knowledge due to strong institutional support, sustainable funding, effective editorial management, and adherence to international publishing standards. In Nigeria, the number of institutional and university-based journals has increased significantly following the rapid expansion of universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, and research institutes [11]. Despite this progress, many of these journals remain underdeveloped and face numerous challenges that limit their quality, sustainability, visibility, and international competitiveness. These challenges are discussed below.

Inadequate Funding

Insufficient funding is widely regarded as the greatest challenge confronting institutional and university-based journals in Nigeria. The production of a high-quality academic journal requires substantial financial investment in manuscript management systems, editorial administration, copyediting, language editing, plagiarism detection software, DOI registration, website hosting, digital archiving, indexing applications, printing (where applicable), and promotional activities. Unfortunately, many universities allocate very little funding to journal development because available resources are often directed towards salaries, infrastructure, and other institutional priorities. The consequence is that many journals struggle to publish regularly, employ qualified editorial staff, organize editorial meetings, maintain functional websites, or subscribe to essential publishing software. Some journals suspend publication for years because they lack the financial resources needed to sustain operations. Poor funding also discourages innovation and prevents journals from competing with well-funded international publications.

Weak Editorial Capacity

The quality of any academic journal depends largely on the competence of its editorial team. In many Nigerian institutions, editors assume editorial responsibilities without receiving formal training in scholarly publishing, editorial management, publication ethics, manuscript editing, digital publishing technologies, or indexing requirements [12]. Consequently, some editorial boards experience difficulties in evaluating manuscripts, coordinating peer review, maintaining editorial consistency, and ensuring compliance with international standards. Weak editorial capacity also results in prolonged manuscript processing periods, inconsistent editorial decisions, poor communication with authors, and inadequate quality control (Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)). Some journals have editorial boards composed mainly of members from a single institution, limiting diversity of expertise and reducing the journal's international appeal. Continuous professional development is therefore necessary to improve editorial competence.

Poor Quality and Delay in the Peer Review Process

Peer review is the mechanism through which manuscripts are critically evaluated by independent experts before publication. It ensures that published research is original, scientifically sound, and methodologically rigorous 9 Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). 2024). However, many Nigerian journals experience significant delays during the peer-review process because qualified reviewers are few and often overloaded with academic responsibilities. Some reviewers delay submitting reports for several months, while others provide very brief or inadequate comments that do not improve manuscript

quality. Editors sometimes experience difficulty identifying specialists willing to review highly technical manuscripts. These delays frustrate authors, prolong publication timelines, and discourage researchers from submitting manuscripts to local journals. In some cases, journals compromise review quality simply to meet publication deadlines [13].

Irregular Publication Schedule

Consistency in publication is one of the major indicators of journal quality. Unfortunately, many Nigerian institutional journals fail to publish according to their stated publication frequency because of inadequate funding, insufficient manuscripts, administrative bottlenecks, or editorial challenges. Some journals publish one issue after several years despite claiming to be biannual or quarterly publications. Irregular publication weakens the confidence of authors, readers, libraries, and indexing organizations. Researchers become reluctant to submit manuscripts when publication dates are uncertain. Furthermore, journals that fail to maintain regular publication schedules rarely qualify for inclusion in internationally recognized indexing databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and DOAJ.

Poor Digital Publishing Infrastructure

Scholarly publishing has become predominantly digital worldwide. Modern journals rely on electronic manuscript submission systems, online peer review, DOI registration, digital preservation, search engine optimization, XML metadata, and online article hosting. However, many Nigerian journals still depend on manual submission through email or printed copies. Some journals lack functional websites, while others operate websites that are outdated, poorly maintained, or inaccessible. Internet connectivity challenges, inadequate technical support, and limited investment in digital infrastructure further reduce online visibility. Consequently, articles published in many Nigerian journals are difficult for international researchers to locate, read, and cite [14].

Low International Visibility and Poor Indexing

International visibility determines the extent to which published research influences global scholarship. Unfortunately, a significant proportion of Nigerian journals are not indexed in reputable databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, or the Directory of Open Access Journals. Many journals fail to satisfy indexing requirements relating to editorial diversity, publication frequency, digital quality, peer review, ethical compliance, and citation performance (Directory of Open Access Journals). Limited indexing significantly reduces readership, citation rates, institutional reputation, and opportunities for international collaboration. Nigerian research therefore receives less global attention despite addressing important developmental challenges.

Weak Compliance with Publication Ethics

Research integrity is fundamental to credible scholarly publishing. Nevertheless, some Nigerian journals continue to experience ethical problems such as plagiarism, duplicate publication, data manipulation, authorship disputes, fabricated peer review, inadequate disclosure of conflicts of interest, and weak editorial oversight. Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) submitted that many journals also lack clearly documented ethical policies or effective procedures for investigating allegations of research misconduct. These ethical weaknesses undermine public confidence, discourage reputable researchers from submitting manuscripts, and reduce opportunities for international indexing and collaboration.

Preference for Foreign Journals by Nigerian Researchers

Promotion policies in many Nigerian universities place considerable emphasis on publications indexed in international databases such as Scopus and Web of Science.

Consequently, many experienced academics prefer submitting their best manuscripts to foreign journals rather than local institutional journals (Ezema, 2010). This practice deprives Nigerian journals of high-quality manuscripts needed to improve their impact factors, citation rates, and international reputation. It also limits the development of indigenous publishing capacity because local journals receive fewer high-quality submissions from leading researchers.

Inadequate Government and Institutional Policy Support

Government intervention in scholarly publishing remains inadequate. Although agencies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC) and TETFund support research activities, there are limited comprehensive policies specifically dedicated to strengthening institutional journals. Many universities also lack strategic plans for journal development, editorial training, international partnerships, and digital transformation. The absence of coordinated national policies has slowed improvements in journal quality and international competitiveness. Sustainable policy support is required to provide financial assistance, technical training, infrastructure development, and incentives for high-performing journals (National Universities Commission (NUC). 2022).

Poor Research Culture and Low Quality of Manuscript Submissions

The quality of a journal depends largely on the quality of manuscripts it receives. Many Nigerian higher education institutions continue to experience challenges relating to inadequate research funding, insufficient laboratory facilities, weak research mentorship, heavy teaching workloads, and limited access to current literature. These conditions negatively affect the quality of research conducted by academics. Aina noted that editors often receive manuscripts with weak research designs, inadequate data analysis, poor academic writing, and methodological deficiencies. Considerable editorial time is therefore devoted to correcting avoidable errors, while some manuscripts are rejected because they fail to meet minimum scientific standards [15]. Poor research quality ultimately limits the credibility and reputation of institutional journals.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Institutional and university-based journals are indispensable instruments for advancing research, promoting scholarly communication, preserving scientific knowledge, and supporting national development. They constitute the primary channels through which universities fulfil their research mandate and disseminate new knowledge to the academic community, policymakers, industry, and society. As Nigeria continues to expand its higher education system and strengthen its research capacity, the development of credible and internationally competitive academic journals has become increasingly important.

The review has shown that although Nigerian institutional and university-based journals have made notable progress, they continue to face numerous structural, financial, managerial, technological, and policy-related challenges that hinder their growth and global recognition. Problems such as inadequate funding, weak editorial capacity, ineffective peer-review systems, irregular publication schedules, poor digital infrastructure, limited international indexing, weak compliance with publication ethics, inadequate policy support, and the migration of quality manuscripts to foreign journals have collectively reduced the visibility and impact of indigenous scholarly publishing. Based on the issues discussed in this paper, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the development, sustainability, and international competitiveness of institutional and university-based journals in Nigeria:

1) The Federal Government of Nigeria should establish a dedicated national intervention fund for academic journals. Such funding should support journal digitization, editorial activities, DOI registration, plagiarism detection software, website development, digital archiving, and applications for international indexing.

2) University management should provide adequate and sustainable financial support for institutional journals. Annual budgetary allocations should be made specifically for journal operations to ensure regular publication, quality editorial services, and compliance with international publishing standards

3) The National Universities Commission (NUC) should develop a national policy for the accreditation and quality assurance of institutional and university-based journals. The policy should establish minimum standards relating to editorial quality, publication ethics, peer review, publication frequency, and digital publishing.

4) TETFund should expand its research intervention programmes to include grants specifically for journal development. Such grants should support editorial capacity building, digital publishing infrastructure, international indexing, and journal quality improvement initiatives.

5) Universities should organize continuous capacity-building programmes for editors, reviewers, and journal administrators. Regular workshops, seminars, and professional certification programmes should focus on editorial management, peer review, publication ethics, digital publishing, artificial intelligence in scholarly publishing, and international best practices.

6) Institutional journals should adopt internationally recognized digital publishing platforms such as Open Journal Systems (OJS). They should also assign Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs), implement online manuscript submission systems, and establish digital preservation mechanisms to improve accessibility and visibility.

Editorial boards should strengthen peer-review processes by maintaining databases of competent reviewers and ensuring that manuscripts undergo rigorous double-blind peer review. Timely review processes should also be encouraged to reduce publication delays.

7) Journal editors should strictly enforce international publication ethics. All submitted manuscripts should undergo plagiarism screening, while clear policies should be established on authorship, conflict of interest, research misconduct, corrections, and retractions in line with the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) guidelines.

Institutional journals should actively pursue inclusion in reputable international indexing databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), African Journals Online (AJOL), Crossref, and Google Scholar. Achieving international indexing will improve visibility, readership, citation rates, and institutional reputation.

8) Universities should review their academic promotion policies to give greater recognition to high-quality accredited Nigerian journals. Such a policy will encourage academics to publish excellent research in reputable local journals while strengthening indigenous scholarly publishing.

9) Institutional journals should establish international collaborations by appointing reputable foreign scholars to editorial boards, engaging international reviewers, and encouraging joint publications with researchers from other countries. Such collaborations will improve editorial quality and global visibility.

10) Universities should strengthen research culture through increased research funding, mentorship programmes, research methodology training, and incentives for quality publications. Improved research quality will enhance the standard of manuscripts submitted to Nigerian journals. Institutional journals should improve their visibility through effective marketing and dissemination strategies. Articles should be promoted through institutional repositories, university websites, academic social networking

platforms, social media, conferences, and professional associations to increase readership and citation impact.

11) Professional associations and journal editors should establish collaborative networks for sharing editorial experiences, reviewer databases, publishing technologies, and quality assurance practices. Such collaboration will promote continuous improvement and standardization across Nigerian journals. Universities should establish dedicated journal management offices staffed by qualified publishing professionals, ICT specialists, copy editors, and editorial assistants. Professional management will improve operational efficiency, publication quality, and long-term sustainability of institutional journals.

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