



THE NIGERIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCE



COMBATTING PREDATORY ACADEMIC PRACTICES IN NIGERIA

A POLICY ROUNDTABLE

MARCH 29TH, 2022
ABUJA, NIGERIA

COMMUNIQUE

Introduction

On Tuesday the 29th of March 2022, the Nigerian Academy of Science (NAS), in partnership with the Nigerian Young Academy (NYA), and with support from the Inter Academy Partnership (IAP), convened a policy roundtable discussion focused on combatting predatory academic practices- including predatory journals and conferences- in Nigeria. The roundtable was held at Reiz Continental Hotel, Abuja, Nigeria, and was attended by thirty-seven stakeholders and decision makers including representatives from Nigerian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Nigerian scientific publications, academic unions, professional bodies, early career scientists, as well as members of the press.

The objectives of the roundtable were to raise awareness among relevant policymakers on predatory academic practices, and their impacts on Nigeria's scientific advancement; identify policies and activities that may be implemented by HEIs and other stakeholders to curtail predatory academic practices in Nigeria; as well as foster collaborative efforts towards addressing predatory practices. The roundtable began with opening remarks by Professor Musbau Akanji FAS (Public Affairs Secretary, NAS), while an outline of the roundtable's objectives and expected outcomes was presented by Dr. Doyin Odubanjo (Executive Secretary, NAS). The opening address which gave an overview of predatory academic practices, and the implications for Nigeria's scientific advancement was delivered by Professor Martin Meremikwu (Director, Cochrane Nigeria). The

first session, chaired by Professor Salihu Mustafa FAS, addressed the drivers of predatory academic practices in the Nigerian context, and featured presentations on predatory open access publishing, governance in academic publishing, and the publish or perish problem delivered by Professor Olanike Adeyemo FAS (Editor in Chief, Proceedings of the Nigerian Academy of Science), Mr Biliamin Popoola (Systems/Evidence-Based Medicine Librarian, University of Medical Sciences, Ondo), and Professor Adesola Ogunniyi FAS (Professor of Medicine, University of Ibadan) respectively. The second session, chaired by Professor John Idoko FAS, was a panel discussion on the problem of predatory academic practices in Nigeria, and stakeholders' roles and perspectives. The panel featured Dr. Stephen Adefegha (Senior Lecturer, Department of Biochemistry, Federal University of Technology, Akure), Professor Abiodun Adebayo (Vice Chancellor, Covenant University), Professor Gabriel Muti (Dean, School of Postgraduate Studies, University of Abuja), Professor Chinwe Anunobi (National Librarian, National Library of Nigeria), and Professor Micah Osilike FAS (Professor of Mathematics, University of Nigeria, Nsukka). The third and final session, chaired by Dr. Mohammed Ibrahim (President, NYA), was a general discussion on the way forward towards combatting predatory academic practices in Nigeria.

Key messages

The following were the key points from the roundtable's deliberations:

1. Predatory academic practices are a global concern, and include a range of activities that are intentionally exploitative. These practices pose a challenge to the integrity of science, scientists, and scholarship in Nigeria. Indeed, it has been reported that two-thirds of papers in predatory journals are authored from Asia and Africa; mainly Nigeria, India, and Pakistan. The implications of the continued proliferation of such practices in Nigeria include poor quality of research, low global ranking of Nigerian scholars, mistrust of research from Nigeria, as well as limitations in securing grants for research. With research being negatively impacted, there will also be ramifications on the quality of research evidence for innovation and decision making for the country's advancement. To enable the Nigerian academic/scientific community contribute to national development, this challenge needs to be urgently addressed.
2. The emergence of open access publishing, though a welcome development, has inadvertently contributed to the rise of predatory journals. This model originated to remove barriers to accessing academic publication, including financial barriers, by shifting such costs to researchers as an article processing charge (APC). Predatory journals and publications utilize this method to collect processing fees from unsuspecting researchers, without rigorous editorial and peer review services.
3. The *publish or perish* problem in Nigeria has led to undue pressure within academic settings to produce journal papers for career progression, and is a contributing factor to the spread of

predatory academic publishing in Nigeria. The combination of the measurement of academic success by the quantity, rather than quality, of papers published, and the absence of an enabling environment for good research, makes Nigerian researchers particularly vulnerable to publishers with compromised and unethical standards.

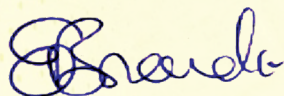
4. Though papers in predatory journals and publications papers are authored by researchers from all disciplines and levels of experience, Nigerian early career researchers are especially at risk. This is largely due to inexperience. Other reasons that lead researchers to patronize predatory publications are lower APCs, faster turnover from submission to publication, disdain for “local” journals, as well as poor capacity for research. However, some researchers are wilful accomplices in predatory academic practices, diminishing the credibility of the scientific community, and undermining the trust of the general public in academia.
5. There are gaps in the governance of academic publishing which drive predatory academic practices. APCs are unregulated, and in most cases where reputable journals have higher publication fees, this is prohibitive for researchers from developing countries such as Nigeria. Also, there are no standardized mechanisms for journal scoring, and in many academic institutions there are gaps in policies on collaborative publishing; which is an advantage when publishing in reputable publications.
6. While predatory journals and conferences are the most common forms of predatory academic practices in Nigeria, these practices are constantly evolving, and other forms such as exploitative employment agents or contractors, fake or embellished qualifications, and other predatory certificates, awards, and medals are equally detrimental to the quality of scholarship and research in Nigeria.

Recommendations


Given the urgent need to secure Nigeria’s scientific future by stemming the tide of predatory academic practices, the roundtables participants put forward the following policy recommendations for combatting predatory academic practices in Nigeria:

1. Mentorship, and collaboration are essential to efforts to combat predatory academic practices. Early career researchers require senior and established researchers as mentors to provide guidance on best practices for academic publishing and avoiding academic predators. Furthermore, collaborative research would help address some of the barriers to conducting quality research specifically as regards access to infrastructure, and equipment for research.
2. Nigerian HEIs should develop lists of reputable journal publications as a reference document for their academic staff. Additionally, capacity strengthening and publishing in highly rated publications should be incentivized.

3. Academic institutions should continually strengthen the capacity of researchers to identify predatory academic practices. Researchers and scholars should receive updated information on predatory journals and conferences, to enable them recognize and avoid them. Courses on predatory academic practices should be introduced into the curricula for postgraduate and undergraduate students. Additionally, HEIs should strengthen the capacity of researchers to secure grants for research, as this would contribute to the conduct of good research that attracts the attention of reputable journals.
4. Nigerian universities should establish, disseminate, and enforce institutional policies on research misconduct, including patronage of predatory journals and publishers.
5. Nigerian HEIs should review their academic appraisal policies, with a view to shift the focus from quantity to quality. This would serve to reduce the intensity of the publish or perish syndrome.
6. HEIs in Nigeria should strengthen their libraries and librarians, and engage their skill sets towards addressing predatory publishing, especially among early career researchers.
7. Relevant stakeholders, including the NAS, Committee of Vice Chancellors of Nigerian Universities (CVCNU), and the National Universities Commission (NUC), should look into the possibility of curating a database of safe and reputable journal publications.
8. Policymakers- the NUC, Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), the Federal Ministry of Education (FMOE), and the Federal Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation (FMSTI) should support the promotion and development of local journals in the country; which are up to international standards. This would include the introduction of journal accreditation services, as well as the establishment of reputable open access journals.
9. Creating an enabling environment for quality research is central to the fight against predatory academic practices in Nigeria. Adequate funding, as well as the availability and accessibility of equipment for research will ensure that Nigerian researchers can conduct good research with outputs that are publishable in reputable journals.



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