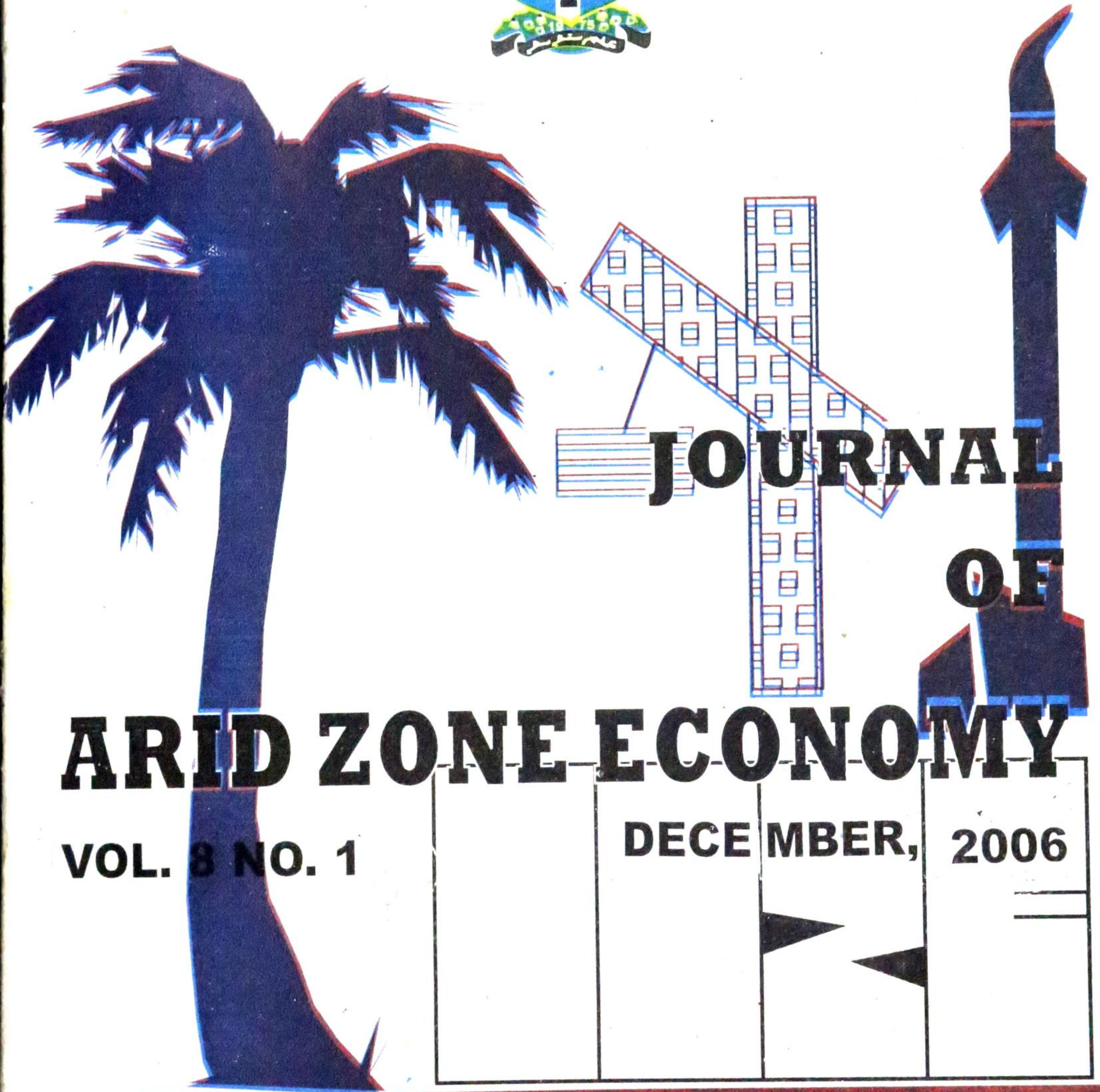




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# **JOURNAL OF ARID ZONE ECONOMY**

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# EDITING AND PUBLISHING SCHOLARLY BOOK REVIEWS IN NIGERIA: PROCEDURES AND PROBLEMS

BY

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## ABSTRACT

*The review of journals is of primary importance in book selection. Editing and publishing book reviews have its own intricacies. The study is aimed at examining the procedures and problems associated with the editing and publication of book reviews. This is more so, because, getting scholarly critiques into print in a timely fashion requires systematic control and coordination. Thus arise the question – “what are the steps and factors affecting editing and publishing of scholarly work”. Survey methodology was adopted and questionnaires were mailed to selected journal publishers in the three major geo-political zones of Nigeria. Findings revealed that little attention is paid to book reviews in Nigeria. There is lack of awareness on the importance of book reviews to the readers and librarians. It also reveals that there are difficulties in getting dedicated reviewers.*

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

Learned journals as an important, if not, indeed, the most widely used vehicle in the modern world of scholarly communication, receive the attention of not only information specialists but also librarians from several points of view. In particular, they share the concern of their users at the difficulty of keeping explosion of scientific journals of very dissimilar standards of excellence (Bandara, 1987) while important sources of new information cannot be ignored. The volume of journals being published is too large and the spread too wide for individual researchers to be able to cover all relevant titles effectively.

The producers of journals, whether they are commercial publishing houses, learned societies of education and research institutions, encounter problem of production and distribution. Bandara (1987) explained that a few of the scholarly journals considered important enough to be indexed for the international scientific communities are produced in developing countries. Most publishers of the scholarly journals have not considered important the inclusion of book reviews in their journals.

### Statement of the Problem

Editing and publishing scholarly book reviews have its own intricacies. There are procedures associated with the editing and publication of book reviews. Getting scholarly critiques into print in a timely fashion requires systematic control and coordination. Our knowledge of this process is to comprehend and perhaps to pardon occasional mishaps in

production schedules. This article helps to understand the procedures and factors affecting scholarly journal publishers in the area of book review production.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- 1) To distill out the steps involved in book review
- 2) To identify the problems of book reviews
- 3) To propose solution to problems so as to bring about improvement in book reviews procedure

### **Research Questions**

- 1) Does your journal include book reviews?
- 2) What are the criteria used in publishing book reviews?
- 3) What are the steps in review of journals by the publisher?
- 4) To what extent do journals include book reviews?
- 5) What are the problems in reviewing the journal?
- 6) In what ways can the problems be minimized?

### **Literature Review**

The importance of the guidelines in good review process cannot be overemphasized. Guidelines can be used to set the tone of the book review. O'Connor (1987) has pointed out that such "guidelines should state the word limit or range, the time allowed for writing the reviews, whether the reviewer will receive a fee, and what the review should ideally include" Good reviews state the content of the book, conveys flavours, evaluate it critically.

Most of the reviews were unsolicited, according O'Connor (1987) he said unsolicited book reviews are good but such should be considered on their merits. Editors who do not want to receive such reviews should say so in their guidelines for authors. However, the author warns over anonymous book reviews. Anonymous book reviews provoke the same questions as anonymous editorial. Unsolicited reviews that are signed are preferable from many points of view, but anonymity allows people to write freely when they might not otherwise do so in reviewing books by their friends or enemies and colleagues.

Bain and Rutledge (1986) say, "A list of books reviewed is more useful than collection of descriptive reviews" From the perspective of librarians and readers of journals, evaluative reviews are helpful, provided that the reviewers discuss the books. All the editors that published book reviews revealed that all book reviews received are edited lightly, if at all. Concentration is on error of fact, spelling and grammar. Vituperative attacks on authors or publishers should be softened into something more civilized and not open to libel action. It is important to note that, as editors' negative reviews need to be avoided. Comments on the price and superfluous in a review; readers should be able to judge from a well – written evaluative reviews whether a book is worth the money.

Manten (1986) observed in newspapers and magazines the apparent zero lags between publication date and review date is achieved for books of general interest by review copies being sent out before the official publication date.

O'Connor (1987) sums it up by saying "The qualities that make for a good critical reviewer are to a large extent the same qualities that make for a good editor of a valuable number of and editorial board, or a helpful dissertation adverse".

Marama and Ogunrombi's (1996) study confirmed the inadequacy of LIS collection in most of the Nigerian University Libraries surveyed. The authors opined that since librarians in University libraries are accorded academic status, and are evaluated equally with their faculty counterparts, they should have access to adequate information materials to enable them publish

**METHODOLOGY**

To handle the issue book reviews production effectively a questionnaire was designed for this purpose. It was a twenty-three-item questionnaire that sought varied information to demographic and procedures employed by journal publishers, year of first publication and the frequency. Information was also sought on whether the journal includes reviews, whether there is a review editor or externally reviewed. In the case of external reviewer, the criteria applied in selecting them were requested. Also information was required on dead line given to reviewer. Since there are different types of reviewers, a question was designed to elicit information on the type carried by the scholarly journals. A few questions centered on the working guidelines, editing the book reviews after submission and the set audience for the reviewer. Finally, a brief comment was solicited on any issue on the topic that was not adequately addressed by the questionnaire.

In order to limit the study to manageable size, due to the constrain of funds the kardex records of the serial holding at the University of Ilorin was researched, out of about a total of 150 active journals (those regularly received) a random of 20 titles that spread across the length of Nigeria were made i.e covering the three major geo-political zones. The questionnaires were mailed to journal editor with a self-address envelope for retuning the completed questionnaire. A reminder was sent to the respondents when their responses were not impressive. However there was improvement as 16 (80%) out of the 20 questionnaires were returned with only 11 (55%) usable. The analysis that follows was based on the 11 responses (55%).

**Results and Discussion**

**Table 1: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON SAMPLED JOURNALS**

| Name of Journal                               | Publisher                                               | Year Established | Frequency      |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Tropical Animal Journal Investigations        | Dept. of Animal Science, University of Ilorin           | 1990             | Twice per year |
| The Chattered Secretary Administrator         | The Institute of Chartered Secretaries & Administrators | Not Indicated    | Quarterly      |
| Nigeria Journal of Horticultural Science.     | Horticultural society of Nigeria                        | 1990             | Annually       |
| Science Forum Journal of Pure Applied Science | Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University School of Science     | 1998             | Twice per year |

|                                                          |                                                      |               |                |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Journal of the Nigeria Society of Chemical Engineers     | Nigeria Society of Chemical Engineers                | 1982          | Twice per year |
| African Journals of Library Archives Information Science | Archlib Information Service                          | 1991          | Twice per year |
| Journal of Chemical Society of Nigeria                   | Chemical Society of Nigeria                          | 1975          | Twice per year |
| Journal of Public Law                                    | Faculty of law Unilorin                              | 2001          | Annually       |
| Nigeria Journal of Applied Science                       | Faculty of Science                                   | 1985          | Annually       |
| Journal International and Law Comparative Law            | Dept of Justice Correspondence and International Law | 1997          | Annually       |
| Medical Education in West African                        | African Postgraduate College Lagos                   | Not indicated | Not indicated  |

Source: Olorunsola R. A. (2002)

A look at table 1 shows that profile of the journals sampled for the study of the eleven title listed, 7 (54.5%) of the journals belong to sciences while 2 (18.2%) are found in law, 2 in medical; looking at the founding data of the journals, the eldest of the journals was established in 1975 while the youngest was established in 2001.

In order to ascertain the popularity of book reviews in the journals investigated, publishers were asked to indicate whether they included reviews in their production. Out of the 11 respondents only a minority 3 (27.3%) indicated that they have column for book reviews, and a majority 8 (72.7%) indicated "no" A few of the publishers that published reviews reported that they relied unsolicited reviews or those written by the editorial members.

In a response to question on criteria used in selecting book reviews, two indicated that they have a set of criteria. The two editors reported that the criteria that are important include subject background, experience in book review and ability to write good English. However they further indicated that they set guidelines for external book reviewers.

All the editors who responded positively and included reviews in their journals published evaluative reviews. Book reviews can be evaluative and descriptive. Descriptive reviews merely recast blurb and the list of contents and helps to make a book's existence known but do not help anyone to decide whether to buy it.

On the time lag before reviews are published a number of editors, 6 (54.5%) of the responding editors reported that editors always give time limit for book reviews. A list of the editors impress on reviewers the necessity for spread and even telephone before hand to make sure that the reviewers can talk on the work and write the review by the date required. From this result, it can be deduced that reviewers are not usually responsible, for the whole of the lag between publication of a book and publication of a reviewers.

However, it is unfair to authors if reviews do not appear for months after publications, especially of the book that is a fast moving subject.

On the opinion of editors on how to achieve quality book review, responses point to one major direction; book reviews should be carefully selected as referees are, but one thing to note is that good reviewers are hard to find.

## **FINDINGS**

Five (5) respondents, constituting 45.5% of the sample gave brief comments as requested in the questionnaire. The comments are varied and diverse in nature. One editor noted that there are not frequent new law books in the market for review. While another journal editor also noted that book review is an area that the journal is proposing to include in the future. Two journal editors complained of the difficulty involved in securing dedicated book reviewers; also important is the frequency of journals, which requires the frequent inclusion of reviews.

## **CONCLUSION**

The result of the study was based on the responses of the 11 journal editors in Nigeria. The results have revealed that little attention has been given to the inclusion of book reviews in Nigerian journals. This corroborates the findings of Olorun-nisola (2002) on the inclusion of reviews in foreign and local library and information science journals. As a result of responses that were detailed enough, it then became difficult to give a position that will reveal all the problems associated with the editing and publishing of reviews in local journals. However, based on the data and information supplied by the respondents a conclusion that can be drawn is that the procedures are too far from what have been discussed in the literature. Responding journals publishers provided guideline for review editors in order to set the tone of the reviews, and journals publishers favour evaluative reviews.

The major problem identified in the study is lack of awareness on the importance of book reviews to the readers and librarians. There is need for awareness that will sensitize journal editors to take necessary steps that will aim at publishing book reviews that will serve the needs of users.

This article has its limitation. The numbers of journals used for the study are too few considering the number of local journals available in Nigeria. For a more detailed and reliable study, the number of journals, should be increased and the sample should cover all disciplines. The outcome of the study has however opened up more areas for research in the area of publishing reviews that will serve the needs of librarians and users of journals.

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