



The High Costs of Publishing in Scopus-Indexed Journals Pose Significant Challenges for Researchers in Developing Nations

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Ugo Chuks Okolie*, Anthony C. Nwokolobia

Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria
Department of Political Science, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

Corresponding Author Email: ugookolie@delsu.edu.ng

<p>Received: March 2025 Revised: April 2025 Accepted: April 2025 Online: May 2025</p>	<p>ABSTRACT</p> <p>In recent years, publications indexed in Scopus have become an essential benchmark for assessing institutional performance and academic quality. Academic institutions and regulatory agencies use these standards to evaluate research quality, institutional standing, and global recognition. The emphasis on Scopus-indexed publications as a quality marker increases the cost of academic research and discredits work from disadvantaged nations and institutions. This study illustrates the difficulties researchers in emerging nations face when publishing in Scopus-indexed journals due to the high fees involved. This study employed content analysis and a qualitative research approach. This study concluded that Scopus-indexed platforms enable academics to publish their work, network with peers, and remain current with developments in their field. Academic collaboration and networking can result in new publications and research initiatives. Nonetheless, many scholars and institutions continue to encounter difficulties due to the high cost of publishing in Scopus-indexed journals, particularly in developing nations.</p>
<p>Keywords: <i>Developing nations,</i> <i>High cost of publishing,</i> <i>Publish or perish,</i> <i>Scopus-indexed journals</i></p>	

1. Introduction

Researchers in developing countries face considerable hurdles due to the steep costs of publishing in Scopus-indexed journals. These complex challenges stem from multiple factors, including limited financial resources, inadequate research funding, and broader structural inequalities in the academic publishing system. Scholars from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) often struggle to afford the high Article Processing Charges (APCs), ranging from \$2,000 to over \$10,000. Such amounts are frequently out of reach, especially in contexts with minimal institutional support. For instance, in countries like Brazil, these costs can consume a large share of a researcher's annual budget, leaving little room for other research needs (Kennedy, 2024).

According to Owan (2023), although some journals provide fee waivers, these are inconsistently implemented and often exclude researchers from upper-middle-income nations, thereby deepening existing disparities. Research indicates that just over half (51.5%) of journals extend waivers to authors from LMICs, and higher APCs are generally linked to a reduced chance of receiving such financial relief. The burden of these costs not only restricts individual researchers but also limits the visibility and impact of diverse academic perspectives on a global scale. In regions like Africa, many researchers are effectively shut out of publishing in reputable, high-impact open-access journals due to the prohibitive costs, contributing to their underrepresentation in international scholarly conversations and hampering career advancement.

[Adetayo et al. \(2023\)](#) affirm that the quest for knowledge and the publicizing of research discoveries is closely intertwined in the academic environment. The publication of academic works is one technique to accomplish research dissemination, which is regarded as the most crucial step in the research effort. Researchers' ability to shape their academic career, validate their work, and promote their field greatly influences their publishing in recognized journals. Scopus-indexed journals are among the most prestigious venues for academic publishing; they are well-known for their stringent peer review procedures and significant influence on the scholarly community. Article processing charges (APCs), or publication fees, are levied by various journals that Scopus indexes. These costs are substantial and pose financial challenges for researchers from developing nations like Nigeria and researchers with insufficient finances for their research endeavors. Furthermore, exchange rate fluctuations make it more difficult for researchers to publish smoothly in Scopus-index journals because fees are often denominated in U.S. Dollars. However, it is essential to remember that Open Access journals typically charge APCs in exchange for allowing users to access scholarly papers without limitations. If writers desire their work to be accessible without charge to readers, hybrid journals may also charge an advance publication price (APC). In the alternative, articles may be published without charge but hidden behind a paywall, requiring readers or institutions to pay a subscription fee to gain access to the articles ([Owan, 2023](#)).

Open-access (OA) policies are becoming steadily more prevalent in many publications. This makes accessing published articles easier for the general public and researchers. For this reason, the Finch Report in the United Kingdom urged universities, research councils, funding councils, and government bodies to commit to advancing open access. Nevertheless, as publishers frequently demand article processing charges (APCs) to support the journals, they frequently come with a price tag for the authors. Over the past 20 years, open access (OA) has revolutionized academic discourse by bringing a new publishing strategy centered on free, unfettered circulation of research outputs. Two options are available to accomplish this goal: gold OA and green OA, which involve storing scholarly works in archives. Journal publishers instantly make articles available for free online under the gold open-access model. However, publishers need authors to pay publication costs rather than readers to remain in business. As a result, authors who want to make their work available in OA must pay APCs to gold OA publications. But not all open-access journals have an APC. Many "diamond" or "platinum" journals get funding from other sources, including university presses and learned bodies. Nevertheless, most private publishers have used APCs, whose revenue is derived from subscription sales. Certain journals operate under a hybrid open-access model that combines paywall subscription materials with open access for papers whose authors pay APCs ([Adetayo et al., 2023](#)).

Public access to information has improved, and researchers have more alternatives for publishing their work thanks to the popularity of open-access journals. Nonetheless, certain open-access journals impose a processing fee on authors at the time of submission. It can get rather pricey in some situations. Introduced by Elsevier in 2004, Scopus has become a well-liked substitute for JCR in assessing the caliber of research. More journals are covered by Scopus, particularly in the humanities and social sciences ([Asubiaro, 2022](#)). Additionally, a greater range of indicators is available for assessing the impact of research. The use of Web of

Science and Scopus by researchers in Nigerian academic institutions has grown in importance. It takes more than scientific rigor and creativity to navigate the difficulties of research distribution and secure publication in journals that Scopus indexes. This necessitates thoroughly comprehending the publishing industry's politics and complexities (Estakhr et al., 2021). Key authors from economically disadvantaged nations have been severely discouraged from open-access publications. Researchers in low-income nations find it difficult to publish their work under open access due to the fees that the majority of Scopus-indexed journals demand.

This study explored the increasing financial burdens researchers in developing countries encounter when trying to publish in Scopus-indexed journals. The motivation behind the study lies in the need to shed light on how Article Processing Charges (APCs) restrict access to academic recognition, limit career advancement, and hinder the global exchange of knowledge among scholars from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The study exposed the structural imbalances within academic publishing by analyzing the effects of these publishing costs. It promoted more accessible, fair, and supportive publishing models for researchers across all economic backgrounds.

2. Research Method

This study employed a historical research approach to examine the progression of publishing costs and their effects on researchers in developing countries. The focus was on uncovering trends, policy developments, and institutional reactions over time. Historical research entails gathering and assessing past data to identify underlying patterns, causes, and consequences. Data for this study were sourced from secondary materials, including academic journals, textbooks, and online resources, and were analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis is a methodical research tool to interpret communication content by identifying recurring themes, patterns, and potential biases.

3. Review of Related Literature

One of the world's most prominent academic publishing organizations, Elsevier, offers the bibliographic database and indexing service (Scopus). It is intended to monitor, evaluate, and make available academic publications, proceedings of conferences, patents, and other scientific work from various fields. Scopus covers various topics, including the social sciences, humanities, technology, medicine, and science. More than 30,000 peer-reviewed journals from more than 7000 publishers worldwide are indexed by the citation database (Nabyonga-Orem et al., 2020). According to Owan (2023), the Scopus database now contains the following types of scholarly materials: journal articles, conference papers, reviews, letters, books, book series, book chapters, patents, trade publications, conference proceedings, data papers, and, most recently, preprints. Publishing in a journal indexed by Scopus is seen as a symbol of excellence and can assist researchers in getting other academics to notice their work. Due to fierce competition for space, publishing in journals indexed by Scopus might be difficult at times.

Run by the private Dutch publisher Elsevier, Scopus is one of the largest abstract and citation databases of peer-reviewed research in many fields. It offers various metrics widely employed to assess the research output of individuals and institutions. Its appeal is derived

from the prospect of objective assessment, enhanced institutional standing, and global standards. However, its rising emphasis raises questions about its trustworthiness as an excellence benchmark. High Scopus-indexed publications confer prestige, increase funding, and propel an institution up the national and international rankings. This dependency is not without debate, though. Although it is commonly believed that journals indexed by Scopus follow strict control measures and peer review procedures, this is inaccurate. Certain journals, especially those motivated by financial gain, provide expedited publishing to authors who are prepared to pay huge fees; this undermines the integrity of Scopus (Akbaritabar et al., 2018).

Requiring publications from Scopus has the danger of marginalizing research that falls short of its requirements. Innovative research, particularly in specialized or developing domains, might be more suitable for non-Scopus or regional publications that serve local populations and deal with urgent local challenges. Disregarding such research is detrimental to the variety of scholarly discourse because Scopus does not index it. Furthermore, unethical behaviors, including plagiarism, data manipulation, and "salami slices" - dividing a study into numerous smaller papers- have been brought about by the pressure to publish in journals that Scopus indexes. Article retractions have increased recently; surprisingly, even faculty members from some prestigious universities have turned to unethical activities. One such instance is the 2012 Elsevier Editorial System breach, in which a researcher by the name "Hyung-In Moon" was able to "independently review" his work despite having 24 retractions (Kennedy, 2024).

Scholars have criticized the overemphasis on Scopus publications, claiming it dilutes the spirit of academic inquiry. They support a more comprehensive method of assessing research that considers factors like interdisciplinarity, innovation, and societal impact in addition to publication volume. They caution that taking risks and limiting creativity are hazards associated with the current system. Additionally, it might make current disparities in academia worse. Scholars at financially supported universities usually have easier access to funding, partners, and resources. On the other hand, scholars from less fortunate households could find it difficult to live up to these expectations, even though their contributions are significant and unique. This discrepancy calls into question the fairness of the existing system and whether or not knowledge production and dissemination are furthered by it.

There is growing opposition to the notion that papers indexed in Scopus are better by nature. A research paper's quality is determined by its technique, findings, and research question, not only by the index in which it appears. Several prestigious local, regional, and specialty journals not included in Scopus publish important studies on specific or local subjects. The diversity of scholarly discourse may be weakened if such work is disregarded only because it is not Scopus-indexed. Unquestionably, the Scopus model also heavily weighs financial considerations (Haustein et al., 2024). The parent company of Scopus, Elsevier, is a for-profit business that levies significant costs for database access, APCs for open-access articles, and journal subscriptions. For many researchers, the exorbitant expenses present serious difficulties. APCs regarding Springer Nature are quite expensive; Nature Communications and Scientific Reports access fees range from \$5,000 to \$6,300. Submission fees are charged by journals, particularly for "fast-track" reviews, which cost roughly \$7,000. Academics wind up

footing hefty costs since Scopus publications are crucial to faculty recruiting new academic staff and career progress (Kennedy, 2024).

The scientific, technical, and medical businesses of Elsevier's parent firm, RELX Group, generated over £2.7 billion in revenue in 2022, with profit margins surpassing 35 percent. This begs the question whether the emphasis on Scopus advances the goals of academia or serves the interests of powerful corporations (Segado-Boj et al., 2022). Positively, the emphasis on Scopus publications has encouraged many scholars to conduct excellent research, collaborate globally, and look for funding for projects likely to be accepted by journals indexed by Scopus (Kennedy, 2024). This push can improve academic prominence, strengthen the school's standing, and add to the corpus of knowledge worldwide. Within this framework, Scopus can effectively promote research excellence (Mekonnen et al., 2022). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the intricate environment of academic publishing while simultaneously criticizing the profit-driven motivations underlying Scopus publications. The services publishers offer are essential to preserving the credibility and accessibility of scholarly research.

3.1. Publish or Perish Culture of Publications

Academic success now depends on publishing research because the academic environment is continually changing. Both highly regarded authors with a small number of publications in the Scopus database and the combination of their publications with those of their colleagues within the same institution have a significant role in determining rankings at the institutional and national levels. Several Nigerian institutions are putting pressure on their faculty members, including librarians, to raise their profile to publish more papers in journals listed in the Scopus index. This is because papers from these listed sites are highly regarded and valued by academic groups. Numerous citations to the papers raise the university's profile. Nonetheless, further justification is needed for the Nigerian academic community's strong interest in publishing in Scopus-indexed journals as a quality indicator. Numerous variables can contribute to the tendency. First, scholars in Nigeria are working hard to increase the visibility of their research outside. This is made easier by publishing in the indexed channels, which expand the visibility and audience for their study. Second, academics in Nigeria know that many foreign funding agencies and institutions prefer research output from publications indexed in Scopus. This implies that scholars who publish in these publications have a higher chance of receiving financing and other research opportunities. Thirdly, research production is important for promotions and career progression in Nigerian universities. Nonetheless, further justification is needed for the Nigerian academic community's strong interest in publishing in Scopus-indexed journals as a quality indicator. Numerous variables can contribute to the tendency. First, scholars in Nigeria are working hard to increase the visibility of their research outside the country. This is made easier by publishing in these indexed channels, which expand the visibility and audience for their study.

The publish-or-perish mantra puts academic publishing in an increasingly precarious position, and there is no doubt that the mental and emotional strain on those who create in this emerging crisis scenario is significant. Those who wish to advance in academia and build their careers must publish to do so, as the phrase "publish or perish" makes abundantly evident. This

idea is often used in higher education organizations in developing countries because neoliberal education policies have increased institutional competition, creating a quantitative rivalry among academicians in these schools. Academic publishing is becoming increasingly vulnerable due to the publish-or-perish mentality, and there is no denying the emotional and mental toll that this growing crisis is taking on those who produce. The adage "publish or perish" clarifies that publishing is necessary for those who want to grow in academics and their careers. Because neoliberal education policies have encouraged institutional competition, which fosters a quantitative approach rivalry among academicians in these schools, this theory is frequently applied in higher education institutions in developing nations. Scientific papers are a source of fresh knowledge and are essential to the efficacy of science. The publication of a scientific work in reputable, esteemed publications is the defining characteristic that renders it worthwhile. As a result, researchers who publish in journals with a Scopus index will probably have an advantage over their colleagues who publish in journals without an index. Lastly, the academic community in Nigeria is aware that research published in publications indexed by Scopus undergoes a thorough review and examination process that guarantees the caliber and legitimacy of the work.

3.2 Discussion of Findings

Publishing in open-access journals often involves high article processing charges (APCs), placing a significant financial burden on researchers. In 2019, medical researchers paid anywhere from \$0 to \$34,676 in APCs, with the median cost being \$191 for general researchers and \$2,900 for those publishing in high-impact journals. Such expenses can be especially challenging for researchers in developing countries, where institutional funding and support may be limited. As a result, scholars from these regions are more susceptible to publishing in predatory journals, many of which are still listed in the Scopus database. This problem is particularly pronounced in economically developing nations, especially in parts of Asia and North Africa. National research assessment policies may also unintentionally push researchers toward these questionable journals. Furthermore, platforms like Scopus have faced criticism for biases favoring certain countries, disciplines, and languages, limiting the visibility and perceived quality of research from underrepresented regions ([Marina & Sterligov, 2020](#); [Alonso-Álvarez, 2024](#)).

Consistent with the findings of this study, [Waltman and Larivière \(2022\)](#); [Pezzullo and Boccia \(2024\)](#) opine that the current academic publishing model, which often requires authors to bear the cost of publication, inherently disadvantages researchers from developing nations. This model shifts the financial burden from readers to authors, creating a pay-to-publish system that can exclude those without sufficient funding. The disparity in APCs and the inconsistent application of waivers contribute to systemic inequities, limiting the participation of researchers from LMICs in the global scientific community.

The cumulative effect of these challenges is a significant underrepresentation of researchers from the Global South in the mainstream academic discourse. Their contributions are often overshadowed by those from wealthier nations, leading to a narrow view of global scientific issues and solutions. This imbalance hampers individual academic careers and affects the diversity and inclusivity of global research output ([Abalkina, 2023](#)).

To address these disparities, there have been increasing calls within the academic community for systemic reforms. Suggested solutions include adopting more transparent and equitable waiver policies, targeted funding support for publication costs from governments and international agencies, and developing alternative publishing models such as diamond open access (where neither authors nor readers pay fees). Additionally, greater collaboration between institutions in high-income and low-income countries could help share publishing resources and expand access to global academic platforms. In essence, ensuring fair and inclusive participation in academic publishing requires a concerted effort to reimagine the financial structures that govern it. Without addressing these systemic inequities, the academic world risks silencing valuable voices and perspectives critical for tackling global challenges.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The financial implications of publishing in open-access, Scopus-indexed journals often outweigh their perceived benefits, especially for researchers who lack adequate funding. While these journals play a critical role in enhancing academic visibility, recognition, and career progression, the associated Article Processing Charges (APCs), ranging from hundreds to thousands of dollars, pose a substantial challenge. These costs are prohibitive for many investigators in low- and middle-income countries, particularly in Africa. Even when fee waivers or discounts are available, many eligible authors are unaware of them or face administrative and institutional hurdles in accessing such support. As a result, scholars are frequently compelled to publish in lesser-known or even predatory journals, which may lack peer-review rigor and academic credibility. This, in turn, negatively impacts their professional growth, limits opportunities for global collaboration, and diminishes the impact and recognition of their research contributions.

In countries like Nigeria, only a limited number of researchers have been able to successfully fund their research publications or engage meaningfully in international scholarly dialogue. The prohibitive costs associated with reputable journals have hindered their ability to publish standard, peer-reviewed research in widely respected databases like Scopus. Nonetheless, for those who can overcome these financial and institutional challenges, Scopus-indexed journals provide a vital platform to disseminate research findings, engage with scholarly communities across borders, and stay abreast of cutting-edge developments within their disciplines. Moreover, Scopus-indexed publications foster academic collaboration, stimulate multidisciplinary research partnerships, and contribute to the global body of knowledge. Such interactions drive innovation, solve complex societal problems, and shape evidence-based policies. However, the high cost of publishing remains a significant barrier for many institutions in developing countries, limiting equitable access to these critical benefits.

In conclusion, while Scopus-indexed journals offer invaluable opportunities for scholarly communication, their financial burden continues to marginalize researchers in low-income settings. There is a compelling need to establish a more equitable academic publishing ecosystem that balances financial sustainability with the broader mission of advancing science and knowledge across all regions. Achieving this balance is not only vital for individual academic success but also for the collective progress of the global research community.

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