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Dynamics of Scholarly Publishing among Early Career Researchers in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract: This study examined the dynamics of scholarly publishing among early-career researchers (ECRs) in Nigerian universities. Using a convergent mixed-methods design, 1,244 ECRs were sampled through stratified, purposive and snowball techniques. Data were collected via a validated semi-structured online questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics for quantitative items and thematic analysis for qualitative responses. Findings

indicate that ECRs adopt structured publishing practices characterised by context-driven idea development, collaborative authorship, strategic journal selection and adaptive task management. Respondents strongly preferred indexed international journals, prioritising impact factor, indexing status and shorter peer-review timelines; preference for open-access journals was moderate. Institutional promotion requirements and pressure, ICT competence, mentorship, collaboration opportunities and database access emerged as major influencing factors, whereas research funding and institutional support were moderately influential. High publication fees, prolonged peer review, inadequate funding, limited institutional support, manuscript acceptance difficulties and inadequate mentorship constituted the major challenges. The study concludes that strengthening institutional funding, structured mentorship programmes, research support services and capacity-building initiatives is essential to improving the quality, productivity and sustainability of scholarly publishing among ECRs in Nigerian universities.

Keywords: Early career researchers; Scholarly publishing; Publishing practices; Nigerian universities; Research productivity

Introduction

The global scholarly communication environment has experienced a profound transformation in recent years, driven by the proliferation of digital technologies, the mainstreaming of open access publishing and the increasing emphasis on research visibility and impact. These developments have reconfigured traditional publishing pathways, enabling faster dissemination of knowledge while simultaneously intensifying competition for publication in reputable outlets (UNESCO, 2021; Tennant et al., 2019). For early career researchers (ECRs), publishing has become both a professional obligation and a strategic activity, closely tied to career advancement, grant acquisition and academic recognition. Contemporary studies suggest that ECRs are navigating a complex environment shaped by journal metrics, peer review expectations and evolving norms around open science and data sharing, all of which influence their publishing decisions and scholarly identities (Crow et al., 2020; Ross-Hellauer, 2017).

In Nigeria, the dynamics of publishing practices among ECRs are further conditioned by contextual realities within universities, including funding constraints, infrastructural limitations and institutional performance metrics (Mills & Branford, 2022). While the adoption of open access platforms has expanded opportunities for global visibility, it has also introduced new challenges, particularly the burden of article processing charges and concerns about journal quality and credibility (Mouton & Valentine, 2017). Moreover, the institutionalisation of promotion criteria that prioritise publication output has reinforced a “publish or perish” culture, compelling many ECRs to make strategic, sometimes difficult choices regarding journal selection, collaboration and authorship practices. Recent studies highlight that limited mentorship, restricted access to indexed journals and inadequate research support systems continue to shape the publishing behaviours of academics in

developing contexts, including Nigeria (Müller & De Rijcke, 2017). Despite these constraints, ECRs increasingly leverage digital scholarly tools, collaborative networks and alternative dissemination channels to enhance the reach and impact of their research (Niyazov et al., 2016).

However, despite the growing recognition of the importance of scholarly publishing in shaping academic careers, there remains insufficient empirical attention to the specific dynamics that underpin publishing practices among early-career researchers in Nigerian universities. Much of the existing literature either adopts a broad African perspective or focuses on general issues of research productivity, thereby overlooking the nuanced experiences, decision-making processes and adaptive strategies of ECRs within the Nigerian context. This gap limits a comprehensive understanding of how systemic pressures, resource constraints and evolving scholarly communication models interact to influence academic practices and research quality. Consequently, there is a critical need to examine the dynamics of publishing practices among early-career researchers in Nigeria and to explore their implications for academic development, institutional policy and the sustainability of scholarly communication.

Research Objectives

The main objective of the study is to examine the dynamics of publishing practices among early-career researchers in universities and determine the implications for academics in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. explore the publishing practices of early-career researchers in Nigerian universities;
2. examine the preferred publication outlets and patterns of scholarly output among early-career researchers in Nigerian universities;
3. identify the factors influencing publishing practices among early-career researchers in Nigerian universities and
4. examine the challenges encountered by early-career researchers in scholarly publishing.

Literature Review

Publishing Practices of Early Career Researchers

In Nigerian tertiary institutions, scholarly publishing has become increasingly significant to academic progression, as institutional promotion systems constantly emphasise peer-reviewed publications as major indicators of research productivity and professional advancement (Tella & Onyancha, 2021). Existing studies generally agree that ECRs engage with conventional publishing pathways, including manuscript development, peer review processes and publication in recognised scholarly outlets (Frandsen & Nicolaisen, 2024; Olayide et al., 2021). However, the

literature indicates that these practices are influenced by broader academic realities rather than individual research competence alone. While ECRs are expected to demonstrate productivity and contribute to knowledge advancement, they frequently operate within environments characterised by competing responsibilities, limited research support and inadequate institutional resources (Heleta & Mzileni, 2024). In many African universities, these constraints are compounded by weak mentoring networks and limited exposure to international publishing conventions, leaving ECRs without the guidance needed to navigate peer-review systems effectively (Mubichi-Kut et al., 2024).

The growing influence of metric-driven evaluation has further shaped how ECRs approach scholarly publishing. Although publication pressure can motivate researchers to increase their scholarly output and visibility, excessive emphasis on publication quantity may encourage strategic behaviours focused on meeting institutional requirements rather than on pursuing long-term research contributions (Müller & de Rijcke, 2017). This tension suggests that increased publication activity does not always correspond with improved research quality or innovation. Therefore, understanding ECRs' publishing practices requires consideration of both productivity expectations and the institutional environments that shape researchers' choices. The transformation of scholarly communication through digital technologies has introduced additional dimensions to publishing practices. Digital platforms, online submission systems, open access repositories and researcher identification systems have expanded opportunities for researchers to disseminate their work beyond traditional publishing boundaries.

Evidence from recent studies shows that digital infrastructures have enhanced access to research outputs and created new strategies for visibility and collaboration, although they have also introduced challenges relating to quality assessment, journal selection and publication integrity (Bergstrom et al., 2024). These innovations show that digitalisation has created opportunities for ECRs but has not eliminated longstanding inequalities associated with research capacity and institutional support. Therefore, the literature presents a mixed representation of ECRs' publishing practices. On the one hand, emerging digital tools and evolving scholarly communication models have enabled researchers to explore broader dissemination strategies. On the other hand, institutional pressures, limited resources, and unequal access to publishing opportunities continue to influence where and how ECRs publish (Igiri et al., 2021). This suggests that publishing practices among ECRs should be examined as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction between individual agency, institutional expectations and wider academic systems.

Publication Outlets and Patterns of Scholarly Output

The choice of publication outlet is a crucial component of scholarly publishing practices because it influences research visibility, credibility, citation potential and

professional recognition. Existing literature indicates that peer-reviewed journals, particularly those indexed in internationally recognised databases, remain the preferred outlets among academics due to their perceived contribution to career progression and institutional reputation. However, studies also reveal a persistent gap between researchers' preference for prestigious outlets and their actual publication choices. In African contexts, financial limitations, institutional support deficits, and competitive editorial processes inhibit access to high-impact journals (Igiri et al., 2021). Consequently, many researchers find themselves unable to explore and disseminate research content in top-tier outlets, which reduces both the quality and visibility of regional research output (Owan & Owan, 2021).

This divergence reflects the influence of contextual realities on publication decisions and demonstrates that outlet selection is not determined solely by scholarly ambition but also by available resources and institutional conditions (Crow et al., 2020). The emergence of open access publishing has further changed publication patterns by providing alternative avenues for wider dissemination of research outputs. While open access models have increased accessibility and potential visibility, concerns regarding article processing charges, journal credibility and the proliferation of predatory publishers remain significant challenges (Tennant et al., 2019; Ross-Hellauer, 2017). These concerns create a complex publishing environment in which ECRs must balance accessibility, affordability and academic credibility when selecting publication outlets. Beyond outlet preference, existing studies highlight changing patterns in scholarly output, particularly the growing importance of collaboration and interdisciplinary research. Collaborative authorship enables ECRs to benefit from established research networks, methodological expertise and opportunities for international engagement (Nocco et al., 2021).

However, the literature also suggests that collaboration may be influenced by unequal academic relationships, where ECRs may depend on senior scholars for research opportunities and publication access (Shinkafi, 2020). At the same time, institutional pressure to increase publication numbers has raised concerns about strategic publication behaviours, including fragmented publication practices intended to maximise output. Although such approaches may improve publication counts, they may also affect the coherence and cumulative contribution of research. Similarly, the increasing involvement of academics in low-quality publishing reflects the interaction between publication pressure, limited awareness of journal quality indicators and restricted access to reputable publishing channels (Asare et al., 2021). Thus, existing studies demonstrate that publication outlets and scholarly output patterns among ECRs are shaped by competing influences. While researchers increasingly seek visibility through international journals, open access platforms and collaborative networks, structural constraints continue to affect their ability to participate fully in global scholarly communication.

Factors Influencing Publishing Practices Among Early Career Researchers

While research competence, motivation and scholarly ambition influence researchers' engagement with publishing, existing literature demonstrates that these factors operate within institutional contexts that either facilitate or constrain publication practices (Oluwasanu et al, 2019). Thus, ECRs' publishing behaviour should be understood as the outcome of an interaction between personal preparedness and the availability of a supportive research environment. Research funding remains one of the most consistently identified factors influencing scholarly publishing outcomes. Existing studies indicate that inadequate funding affects multiple stages of the research process, including study design, data collection, access to research resources, and the ability to meet publication-related expenses such as article processing charges (Asare et al., 2021; Chankseliani, 2023). Although researchers may possess the necessary expertise to conduct and publish quality studies, limited financial support can restrict their ability to participate effectively in competitive scholarly communication systems.

This suggests that publication disparities among ECRs are not solely related to research capacity but are also linked to unequal access to the resources required for knowledge production. Beyond funding, mentorship and institutional research support have been recognised as important determinants of publishing success. ECRs often depend on experienced academics for guidance on research methodology, manuscript preparation, journal selection and navigating peer review processes (Nocco et al., 2021). However, the literature suggests variations in the availability and effectiveness of mentorship structures across institutions. A systematic review of mentorship programs across 12 African countries found that while effective mentorship leads to increased publications, successful grant applications and improved research skills, significant gaps persist due to limited funding, lack of a mentorship culture and inadequate prioritisation of research mentorship (Ng'oda et al., 2024).

While strong mentoring relationships can improve publication confidence and research productivity, limited access to experienced supervisors and research networks may hinder ECRs' ability to develop sustainable publishing trajectories. Institutional policies and academic reward systems are also significant in shaping publication practices. In many Nigerian tertiary institutions, promotion and career advancement criteria place considerable emphasis on publication output, creating incentives for researchers to prioritise productivity. While such policies are intended to encourage research engagement, they may also generate pressures that influence journal selection, research priorities and publication strategies (Izuakor et al., 2026). While institutional promotion requirements serve as important drivers of research engagement, increasing concerns have been raised regarding evaluation systems that rely predominantly on publication quantity as a measure of academic performance. Excessive emphasis on the number of publications may encourage

productivity-oriented behaviours that do not always translate into research originality, methodological innovation or broader scholarly impact.

Therefore, international research assessment reforms have advocated a shift towards more balanced evaluation frameworks that recognise qualitative dimensions of academic contribution. The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) emphasises that research assessment should "focus on the quality, significance, and impact of scholarly outputs rather than relying solely on journal-based indicators or publication counts" (DORA, 2012). Similarly, the Leiden Manifesto recommends that quantitative metrics should "complement, rather than replace, expert judgement" in evaluating research performance (Hicks et al., 2015, p. 429). These emerging practices suggest that Nigerian universities could benefit from promotion systems that balance publication productivity with considerations of originality, research contribution, collaboration and societal relevance. Technological competence and access to scholarly infrastructure represent additional factors influencing contemporary publishing practices.

The ability to use digital research tools, access online databases, manage references and engage with international publishing platforms increasingly determines researchers' participation in global scholarly communication (Tella & Onyancha, 2021). Studies have shown that variations in digital literacy, research infrastructure and exposure to global scholarly networks affect the capacity of ECRs to engage effectively with international publishing opportunities (Okechukwu et al., 2024). However, technological access alone does not guarantee publishing success, as researchers must also possess the skills required to navigate complex academic writing conventions and journal requirements. Similarly, academic writing proficiency and familiarity with international publishing expectations remain important considerations. Limited training in scholarly writing, manuscript development and publication ethics may reduce ECRs' ability to compete for publication in high-impact journals (Mubichi-Kut et al., 2024).

Challenges Encountered by Early Career Researchers in Scholarly Publishing

Despite increasing participation in scholarly publishing, ECRs in Nigerian tertiary institutions continue to encounter several challenges that affect their ability to produce and disseminate research effectively. One of the most frequently reported challenges is inadequate research funding. Limited financial resources affect researchers' ability to conduct comprehensive studies, access relevant research materials, attend academic conferences and cover publication costs. Existing evidence indicates that funding limitations remain a significant barrier to research productivity in Nigeria, reducing researchers' capacity to compete within increasingly globalised scholarly communication systems (Shinkafi, 2020; Chankseliani, 2023). While some ECRs attempt to overcome these limitations through collaboration and

alternative funding arrangements, such strategies may not fully address the broader structural weaknesses affecting research development.

Time constraints represent another significant challenge. ECRs often manage competing responsibilities, which include teaching commitments, administrative assignments, student supervision and research expectations. A recent survey of over 1,000 young researchers across Africa found that four-fifths had considered leaving the continent due to heavy workloads that erode research productivity, alongside poor job security and lack of resources (Research Professional News, 2024). Although institutional policies encourage increased scholarly output, limited protected research time may restrict researchers' ability to engage in sustained and rigorous research activities (Bello & James, 2025). This creates a contradiction between institutional expectations for increased productivity and the practical conditions under which ECRs are expected to produce research.

The challenge of predatory publishing has also become increasingly prominent within academic environments where publication pressure is high. While predatory journals may appear attractive because of their rapid review and publication processes, they undermine research quality and academic integrity by bypassing established peer-review standards. International evidence indicates that ECRs are particularly vulnerable to such outlets due to limited publishing experience, inadequate mentorship and pressure to fulfil promotion requirements (Asare et al., 2021; Nicholas et al., 2023). This highlights the importance of strengthening research ethics training and institutional guidance on responsible publishing practices. In addition to these challenges, ECRs face difficulties associated with journal rejection, limited research training, inadequate institutional support and restricted access to scholarly infrastructure (Hoover & Lucas, 2024). These challenges are further complicated by broader inequalities within global scholarly communication systems.

Research from developing regions may experience reduced visibility due to structural disadvantages, including unequal access to publishing networks, resource limitations and potential biases in global knowledge evaluation systems (Smith et al., 2014; Sun & Litavec, 2025). The dominance of Western Europe and North America in academic publishing perpetuates a cycle in which Global South journals are less likely to be indexed, less likely to appear in search listings and often perceived as lower quality, thereby diminishing the reach of regional research (Bol et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the literature also demonstrates that ECRs are not passive participants within these systems. Many researchers adopt adaptive strategies, including collaboration, digital dissemination and engagement with alternative publishing channels, to overcome existing barriers. However, these strategies often represent responses to constrained environments rather than evidence that underlying challenges have been resolved. Therefore, improving ECRs publishing outcomes requires interventions that address not only individual research skills but also institutional support systems, funding structures and broader inequalities affecting scholarly communication (Hoover & Lucas, 2024).

Literature Gap

Although academic publishing has received increasing scholarly attention, limited understanding exists regarding the specific publishing practices of ECRs within Nigerian univeristies. Existing studies have provided insights into research productivity, scholarly communication and publication challenges; however, many have examined these issues broadly without sufficiently addressing the behaviours, decisions and experiences of ECRs as a distinct group (Crow et al., 2020). While factors such as funding constraints, institutional expectations, mentorship and research infrastructure are recognised as influencing academic publishing, they are often examined independently, leaving limited understanding of how they jointly shape ECR publishing trajectories in Nigeria. Furthermore, insufficient empirical attention has been given to how ECRs navigate journal selection, indexing requirements, publication costs, open access options and alternative dissemination strategies within resource-constrained environments.

Although global studies highlight the significance of high-impact journals, collaborative authorship and digital scholarly platforms (Tennant et al., 2019; Ross-Hellauer, 2017), evidence remains limited on how these dynamics are experienced and negotiated by Nigerian ECRs. Similarly, challenges such as predatory publishing, article processing charges and promotion pressures are often discussed separately rather than as interconnected factors influencing publication behaviour. Therefore, an integrated understanding of how institutional conditions, resource limitations and scholarly communication practices interact to shape ECR publishing decisions and outcomes remains underexplored. This study addresses this contextual, empirical and analytical gap by examining publishing patterns, influencing factors, decision-making processes and challenges among ECRs in Nigerian tertiary institutions, thereby contributing evidence for strengthening research support systems and improving scholarly participation.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously, analysed separately and integrated during interpretation to identify convergent findings and provide complementary insights into ECRs publishing practices.

Population and Sample

The population comprised all ECRs who are academic staff in their first one to ten years of employment in Nigerian federal universities. Six universities were purposively selected, one from each of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. Snowball

sampling was used to identify eligible ECRs within these institutions. A total of 1,244 valid responses were obtained. There is no centralised database of early-career researchers maintained by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) or the National Universities Commission (NUC). Consequently, a definitive sampling frame does not exist, and the population is defined conceptually rather than numerically. This justifies the use of snowball sampling to identify eligible respondents across the purposively selected institutions.

Instrument

Data were collected using a semi-structured online questionnaire comprising demographic items, closed-ended questions (categorical and 4-point Likert-scale) and open-ended questions. The closed-ended section measured publication outlets, influencing factors, and challenges; the open-ended section explored publishing practices. Content validity was established through expert review by three scholars in Library and Information Science. A pilot study with 30 ECRs from non-participating universities confirmed instrument clarity. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha; all constructs exceeded the 0.70 threshold.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was administered online over twelve weeks (29 September to 21 December 2025). Electronic informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and participation was voluntary.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics: frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations. Likert-scale items were interpreted on a 4-point scale: 1.00-1.49 (Low), 1.50-2.49 (Moderate) and 2.50-4.00 (High). Qualitative data were analysed thematically through six phases: familiarisation, initial coding, categorisation, theme identification, refinement and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The qualitative and quantitative findings were integrated during interpretation, with narratives used to explain statistical patterns, consistent with the convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to accepted research ethics standards. Participants were informed of the study purpose, and their right to withdraw was respected. Data were used solely for academic purposes.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 1,244)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	782	62.9
	Female	462	37.1
Age	20-29 years	214	17.2
	30-39 years	648	52.1
	40-49 years	302	24.3
	50 years and above	80	6.4
Academic Rank	Assistant Lecturer	318	25.6
	Lecturer II	566	45.5
	Lecturer I	360	28.9
Years of Experience	1-3 years	402	32.3
	4-6 years	486	39.1
	7-10 years	356	28.6
Faculty/Discipline	Sciences	210	16.9
	Social Sciences	188	15.1
	Humanities	162	13.0
	Education	146	11.7
	Engineering/Technology	158	12.7
	Management Sciences	154	12.4
	Medical/Health Sciences	126	10.1
	Agriculture	100	8.1
Geopolitical Zone / University	North-Central - University of Ilorin	214	17.2
	North-East - University of Maiduguri	176	14.2
	North-West - Ahmadu Bello University	238	19.1
	South-East - University of Nigeria	198	15.9
	South-South - University of Benin	202	16.2
	South-West - University of Ibadan	216	17.4
Total		1,244	100.0

The findings from Table 1 reveal that the majority of respondents were male (62.9%), while female respondents accounted for 37.1%, indicating a gender imbalance that is consistent with patterns commonly reported in Nigerian academia. In terms of age distribution, the largest proportion of respondents (52.1%) fell within the 30-39 years age bracket, followed by those aged 40-49 years (24.3%). This suggests that the study predominantly captured individuals in the active phase of early academic careers, where research productivity and publication output are

prioritised. Respondents aged 20-29 years (17.2%) and those 50 years and above (6.4%) were less represented, reflecting the transitional nature of entry and exit points within the early career stage. The distribution by academic rank shows that Lecturer II constituted the largest group (45.5%), followed by Lecturer I (28.9%) and Assistant Lecturers (25.6%). This confirms that the sample is appropriately aligned with the definition of ECRs, as most participants occupy junior academic positions. With regard to years of academic experience, the majority of respondents (39.1%) had 4-6 years of experience, followed by those with 1-3 years (32.3%) and 7-10 years (28.6%). This distribution further validates that respondents are within the early stages of their academic careers, with a balanced spread across experience levels. The disciplinary distribution indicates a broad and balanced representation across faculties, with notable participation from sciences (16.9%), social sciences (15.1%) and engineering/technology (12.7%), among others. The inclusion of diverse fields such as medical/health sciences, management sciences, education and agriculture enhances the robustness of the study, as publishing practices often vary across disciplines. Furthermore, the respondents were distributed across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, ensuring national representation. The North-West zone recorded the highest proportion (19.1%), followed by the South-West (17.4%) and North-Central (17.2%) zones. The South-South (16.2%) and South-East (15.9%) zones showed moderate representation, while the North-East (14.2%) had the lowest proportion. This distribution reflects variations in institutional size, accessibility and participation rates across regions.

Objective 1: Explore the Publishing Practices of Early-Career Researchers in Nigerian Universities

Thematic analysis of the qualitative data addressing Objective 1 revealed five dominant themes: Idea Development and Manuscript Conception; Manuscript Preparation and Journal Submission Processes; Peer Review Experience and Revision Strategies; Authorship Decision-Making (Individual versus Collaborative Publishing); and Research Task Management Strategies.

Idea Development and Manuscript Conception

A major finding from the analysis is that ECRs typically develop research ideas through a combination of classroom experience, supervision influence, current academic discourse and identified research gaps within Nigerian contexts. Across all geopolitical zones, participants described idea generation as both opportunistic and structured. A respondent from the North-Central zone stated: “Most of my research ideas come from gaps I observe while teaching and from my supervisors during postgraduate training. I usually refine them by reviewing recent journal articles.” Similarly, an ECR from the South-West noted: “I start by identifying a problem in Nigerian education or information systems, then I check if it has been properly

addressed in existing literature." In the South-East, a participant explained: "Seminars and conference presentations help me reshape my initial ideas into something publishable." These responses indicate that idea development among Nigerian ECRs is strongly context-driven and literature-sensitive, with emphasis on local relevance and academic gap identification.

Manuscript Preparation and Journal Submission Processes

The second theme highlights that manuscript preparation follows a structured but resource-dependent process, typically involving drafting, supervisor consultation, journal selection, formatting and submission via online systems. An ECR from the North-West explained: "After writing my draft, I sent it to my senior colleague for review before selecting a journal that matches the scope." From the South-South zone, a respondent stated: "Journal formatting is one of the most difficult parts, especially when each journal has different referencing styles and templates." A North-East participant added: "I usually target Scopus or DOAJ journals, but submission delays often happen because of technical requirements or APC issues." Across zones, submission processes were reported to be influenced by technical journal requirements, internet accessibility and publication fees, which often slow down manuscript completion and submission timelines.

Peer Review Experience and Manuscript Revision Processes

Participants consistently described peer review as a challenging but developmental stage, characterised by both constructive feedback and occasionally harsh reviewer comments. A South-West ECR noted: "Some reviewers give very helpful comments that improve the quality of the paper, but others are too critical without clear guidance." In the North-Central zone, a respondent stated: "I once received rejection after six months of review, which was discouraging, but I later revised the paper and published it elsewhere." A South-East participant explained: "Revision usually requires additional data or restructuring the methodology, which sometimes delays publication for months." Peer review is perceived as a double-edged process, simultaneously improving manuscript quality while also introducing delays and emotional strain for ECRs.

Decision to Publish Individually or Collaboratively

Findings show that the decision to publish individually or collaboratively is influenced by supervisory relationships, funding availability, workload and perceived journal acceptance rates. A North-East respondent explained: "I prefer collaboration because it increases my chances of acceptance, especially when working with senior academics." From the South-South zone: "Sometimes I publish alone when the research is small, but most times collaboration is necessary for international journals." A North-West participant added: "Collaboration helps reduce workload

and improves methodological strength, especially for complex studies." However, some ECRs also expressed concerns about authorship disputes and unequal contributions, particularly in large research teams.

Strategies for Managing Multiple Research and Publication Tasks

The final theme reveals that ECRs employ various strategies to manage competing academic responsibilities, including time management, prioritisation of journals, research scheduling and multitasking across projects. A South-West participant stated: "I allocate specific days for teaching and others for writing manuscripts to avoid overload." From the North-Central zone: "I keep multiple manuscripts at different stages so that while one is under review, I continue working on another." A South-East ECR explained: "Deadlines and promotion requirements force me to manage several research projects simultaneously." These findings indicate that ECRs operate under high workload.

Objective 2: Examine the Preferred Publication Outlets and Patterns of Scholarly Output Among Early-Career Researchers in Nigerian Universities

Table 2: Preferred Publication Outlets and Patterns of Scholarly Output Among Early-Career Researchers in Nigerian Universities (n = 1,244)

S/N	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD	Decision
1	I prefer publishing in international journals over local journals	604 (48.6)	472 (37.9)	108 (8.7)	60 (4.8)	3.31	0.76	High
2	I select journals based on indexing status (Scopus, Web of Science)	687 (55.2)	418 (33.6)	92 (7.4)	47 (3.8)	3.40	0.71	High
3	I prefer open-access journals for publishing my research	250 (20.1)	410 (33.0)	360 (28.9)	224 (18.0)	2.47	0.92	Moderate
4	I publish more journal articles than conference papers	514 (41.3)	496 (39.8)	173 (13.9)	61 (5.0)	3.17	0.79	High
5	I consider the journal impact factor when selecting publication outlets	581 (46.7)	452 (36.4)	139 (11.2)	72 (5.7)	3.24	0.80	High
6	I prefer journals with shorter peer review turnaround times	644 (51.8)	412 (33.1)	128 (10.3)	60 (4.8)	3.32	0.75	High
7	My publications are mostly co-authored rather than single-authored	541 (43.5)	438 (35.2)	174 (14.0)	91 (7.3)	3.15	0.81	High
8	I publish at least one article per year	432 (34.7)	481 (38.6)	231 (18.5)	102 (8.2)	3.00	0.84	High
9	My scholarly output has increased over the past three years	300 (24.1)	380 (30.5)	350 (28.1)	214 (17.2)	2.49	0.90	Moderate

The results reveal that most identified publishing preferences were rated high by respondents, indicating a strong orientation towards established scholarly practices. These include selection of journals based on indexing status (Mean = 3.40), preference for shorter peer review turnaround time (Mean = 3.32), preference for international journals (Mean = 3.31), consideration of journal impact factor (Mean = 3.24), preference for journal articles over conference papers (Mean = 3.17), co-authorship practices (Mean = 3.15) and regular publication output (Mean = 3.00). However, preference for open access journals (Mean = 2.47) and perceived increase in scholarly output over the past three years (Mean = 2.49) were rated at a moderate level of agreement, suggesting uneven adoption of emerging scholarly communication practices. The quantitative findings indicate that ECRs strongly prefer publishing in indexed international journals (Mean = 3.40) and journals with shorter peer-review turnaround times (Mean = 3.32). These findings are consistent with the qualitative data, where participants described indexing status, journal reputation, publication speed and career advancement as major considerations when selecting publication outlets. One participant remarked, “I usually target Scopus or DOAJ journals because they carry more weight for promotion,” while another explained that lengthy review periods often discourage submission to certain journals. Together, the quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that publication decisions are largely driven by visibility, institutional expectations and publication efficiency.

Objective 3: Identify the Factors Influencing Publishing Practices Among Early Career Researchers In Nigerian Universities

Table 3: Factors Influencing Publishing Practices Among Early Career Researchers in Nigerian Universities (n = 1,244)

S/N	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Institutional promotion requirements influence my publishing practices	727 (58.4)	407 (32.7)	76 (6.1)	34 (2.8)	3.47	0.68	High
2	Availability of research funding affects my publication output	410 (33.0)	420 (33.8)	260 (20.9)	154 (12.4)	2.48	0.86	Moderate
3	Mentorship from senior academics enhances my publishing success	619 (49.8)	450 (36.2)	126 (10.1)	49 (3.9)	3.32	0.75	High
4	Access to academic databases influences my publication decisions	651 (52.3)	421 (33.8)	119 (9.6)	53 (4.3)	3.34	0.73	High
5	Institutional research support improves my publishing productivity	395 (31.8)	415 (33.4)	275 (22.1)	159 (12.8)	2.49	0.87	Moderate

S/N	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD	Decision
6	Collaboration opportunities influence my publishing behaviour	630 (50.6)	441 (35.4)	122 (9.8)	52 (4.2)	3.32	0.74	High
7	Pressure for promotion motivates my publishing output	749 (60.2)	380 (30.5)	75 (6.0)	40 (3.3)	3.48	0.66	High
8	Awareness of predatory journals influences my journal selection	596 (47.9)	468 (37.6)	129 (10.4)	51 (4.1)	3.29	0.76	High
9	ICT skills affect my ability to publish effectively	661 (53.1)	426 (34.2)	108 (8.7)	49 (4.0)	3.36	0.72	High

The results show that most identified factors were rated highly by respondents. These include pressure for promotion (Mean = 3.48), institutional promotion requirements (Mean = 3.47), ICT skills (Mean = 3.36), access to academic databases (Mean = 3.34), mentorship from senior academics (Mean = 3.32), collaboration opportunities (Mean = 3.32) and awareness of predatory journals (Mean = 3.29). However, the availability of research funding (Mean = 2.48) and institutional research support (Mean = 2.49) were rated at a moderate level of agreement, reflecting variability in resource availability across Nigerian universities. The quantitative findings show that promotion requirements, ICT skills, mentorship, collaboration and access to databases strongly influence publishing practices. These findings are reinforced by participants' narratives, which emphasised the role of supervisors, senior colleagues, institutional expectations and digital resources in shaping publication behaviour. Respondents also described promotion requirements as a major factor influencing continuous research productivity.

Objective 4: Examine the Challenges Encountered by Early-Career Researchers in Scholarly Publishing

Table 4: Challenges Encountered by Early-Career Researchers in Scholarly Publishing (n = 1,244)

S/N	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Lack of funding limits my ability to publish in reputable journals	707 (56.8)	412 (33.1)	90 (7.2)	36 (2.9)	3.44	0.70	High
2	High publication fees are a major challenge	765 (61.5)	366 (29.4)	76 (6.1)	37 (3.0)	3.50	0.66	High
3	Long peer review processes delay my publications	724 (58.2)	393 (31.6)	88 (7.1)	39 (3.1)	3.45	0.69	High
4	Difficulty in manuscript acceptance affects my productivity	631 (50.7)	458 (36.8)	111 (8.9)	45 (3.6)	3.35	0.74	High
5	Limited access to current literature affects my writing quality	260 (20.9)	318 (25.6)	412 (33.1)	185 (14.9)	2.31	0.78	Moderate

S/N	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD	Decision
6	Lack of institutional support hinders my publishing activities	654 (52.6)	444 (35.7)	101 (8.1)	45 (3.6)	3.37	0.73	High
7	Difficulty in selecting appropriate journals is a major challenge	609 (48.9)	463 (37.2)	126 (10.1)	47 (3.8)	3.31	0.76	High
8	Language and writing skills affect my publication success	248 (20.0)	301 (24.2)	428 (34.4)	198 (15.9)	2.22	0.81	Moderate
9	Inadequate mentorship negatively affects my publishing experience	638 (51.3)	434 (34.9)	117 (9.4)	55 (4.4)	3.33	0.75	High

The results reveal that most identified challenges were rated high by respondents. These include high publication fees (Mean = 3.50), prolonged peer review processes (Mean = 3.45), lack of funding (Mean = 3.44), lack of institutional support (Mean = 3.37), difficulty in manuscript acceptance (Mean = 3.35), inadequate mentorship (Mean = 3.33) and difficulty in journal selection (Mean = 3.31). However, limited access to current literature (Mean = 2.31) and language and writing skills (Mean = 2.22) were rated at a moderate level. High publication fees, prolonged peer review, inadequate institutional support and funding constraints emerged as major quantitative challenges. Participants' narratives further illustrated these challenges by describing repeated manuscript revisions, publication delays, article processing charges and limited financial support for research. The qualitative evidence therefore provides contextual explanations for the quantitative results, highlighting how structural constraints influence publishing productivity among ECRs.

Discussion of Findings

Thematic analysis addressing Objective 1 revealed that ECRs in Nigerian federal universities operate within an institutionalised knowledge production system where supervision, classroom experiences and locally grounded problem identification shape research direction (Frandsen & Nicolaisen, 2024; Olayide et al., 2021). However, Heleta and Mzileni (2024) observe that reliance on local supervisory networks may simultaneously limit exposure to international research agendas, reinforcing bibliometric coloniality, a structural condition in which Global North indexes render locally grounded research less visible. Manuscript preparation follows structured but resource-dependent processes, with digital platforms expanding access while increasing submission complexity (Bergstrom et al., 2024). Peer review functions as a double-edged mechanism, improving quality while introducing delays and emotional strain under metric-driven pressures (Müller & de Rijcke, 2017). Collaborative authorship emerges as a strategic response to workload and acceptance pressures, yet concerns about unequal contributions reflect persistent academic power dynamics (Nocco et al., 2021). Collectively, these practices illustrate what

Mubichi-Kut et al. (2024) describe as adaptive labour under institutional neglect strategies born of necessity rather than supportive infrastructure.

Findings from Table 2 indicate that ECRs predominantly prefer indexed international journals (M = 3.40), high-impact outlets (M = 3.24) and shorter peer-review turnaround times (M = 3.32), reflecting a strategic orientation towards visibility and career advancement. As Owan and Owan (2021) demonstrate, the use of journal impact factors as proxies for researcher quality creates a hierarchical publishing environment in which ECRs feel compelled to target elite outlets regardless of disciplinary fit or resource capacity. The strong preference for co-authorship (M = 3.15) and regular publication output (M = 3.00) further confirms that ECRs prioritise recognised academic standards and productivity metrics in their publishing decisions. However, moderate engagement with open access journals (M = 2.47) and perceived productivity growth (M = 2.49) suggests uneven adoption of emerging scholarly communication practices, constrained by article processing charges and awareness barriers in developing contexts (Asare et al., 2021). The preference for expedited review cycles must also be understood in relation to institutional promotion timelines: when evaluation clocks are ticking, ECRs cannot afford lengthy review cycles even at prestigious journals, a tension that underscores the incompatibility between metric-driven institutional pressures and the temporal realities of quality peer review.

Results from Table 3 demonstrate that publishing practices are significantly shaped by institutional promotion requirements (M = 3.47) and promotion pressure (M = 3.48), confirming the dominance of “publish or perish” cultures in Nigerian universities. This aligns with Müller and de Rijcke (2017), who argue that metric-driven evaluation systems prioritise quantifiable output over qualitative contribution, thereby distorting research behaviour; the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA, 2012) explicitly cautions against such reliance on journal-based metrics, advocating instead for assessment frameworks that recognise the quality and significance of scholarly outputs. ICT skills (M = 3.36), database access (M = 3.34), mentorship (M = 3.32) and collaboration opportunities (M = 3.32) also emerge as significant determinants, highlighting the growing importance of digital literacy and social networks in contemporary scholarly communication (Oluwasanu et al, 2019; Okechukwu et al., 2024; Nocco et al., 2021). Notably, research funding (M = 2.48) and institutional research support (M = 2.49) were rated only moderately, indicating inconsistency in resource availability across universities and suggesting that while institutional support exists in principle, its practical accessibility varies significantly, creating a two-tier system in which ECRs at better-resourced institutions enjoy advantages unavailable to their colleagues elsewhere.

Table 4 identifies high publication fees (M = 3.50), prolonged peer review (M = 3.45), inadequate funding (M = 3.44), limited institutional support (M = 3.37), manuscript acceptance difficulties (M = 3.35) and inadequate mentorship (M = 3.33) as the most significant challenges confronting ECRs. These findings strongly correspond with the literature highlighting financial constraints, infrastructural

deficits and systemic inequalities as persistent barriers to scholarly publishing in developing academic systems (Hoover & Lucas, 2024). The moderate ratings for limited literature access (M = 2.31) and language barriers (M = 2.22) are particularly instructive, suggesting that the most significant barriers to publishing success among Nigerian ECRs are systemic rather than purely individual, reinforcing the argument that scholarly productivity is shaped more by structural inequalities than personal academic competence. As Bol et al (2023) argue, the global scholarly communication system is not a neutral marketplace of ideas but a stratified structure in which researchers from the Global South face disproportionate barriers to entry, visibility and recognition; nevertheless, the findings also demonstrate that ECRs adopt adaptive strategies including collaboration, strategic journal targeting and digital tool engagement to navigate these constraints, though such strategies represent coping mechanisms within constrained environments rather than evidence that underlying challenges have been resolved.

Conclusion

The study investigated publishing practices among early-career researchers in Nigerian universities, with emphasis on their publishing patterns, preferred outlets, influencing factors and the challenges affecting their scholarly output. Findings reveal that although ECRs are actively engaged in research and publication activities, their publishing practices are largely shaped and constrained by institutional, structural and resource-related factors. High dependence on supervisory guidance, institutional promotion requirements, technical submission systems, publication fees and limited funding significantly influences how research is developed, prepared and disseminated. In addition, peer review processes, while beneficial for improving manuscript quality, often contribute to delays and emotional strain, further complicating publication timelines. The study also shows that ECRs demonstrate a strong preference for indexed, international, and high-impact journals, reflecting a strategic orientation towards visibility and academic advancement. However, engagement with open access publishing and perceived growth in research productivity remain moderate, indicating uneven adoption of emerging scholarly communication practices. Collaborative authorship is widely adopted as a coping and strategic mechanism, driven by perceived benefits such as improved acceptance rates and shared workload, although concerns about unequal contributions and authorship tensions persist. Nevertheless, ECRs have developed adaptive responses to navigate these constraints, including reliance on mentorship networks, collaboration with senior academics, strategic journal targeting and engagement with available digital scholarly tools. Despite these efforts, the study concludes that significant disparities in institutional support, funding availability and access to robust scholarly networks continue to limit publication outcomes. Consequently, scholarly publishing among ECRs remains uneven, with persistent structural and systemic barriers shaping both productivity and visibility within the Nigerian academic background.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the study recommends that:

1. Universities should establish structured early-career publishing support programmes that include research writing clinics, mentoring schemes and peer-review training to strengthen the publication capacity of ECRs.
2. University libraries and research offices should provide journal advisory services to guide ECRs in selecting reputable publication outlets, understanding indexing requirements and avoiding predatory journals.
3. Universities should integrate continuous research capacity development initiatives, including digital scholarship training, database access support and collaborative research platforms, to upskill ECRs.
4. Universities and research funding agencies should establish targeted publication support schemes, including research grants, article processing charge assistance and partnerships with reputable publishers to improve ECRs' access to quality publishing outlets.

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