

Research Article

Idowu Adegbilero-Iwari*, Olabode Olajide, Nkeiru Amauche Emezie, Sadiat Adetoro Salau, Joseph Kehinde Fasae, Clement Ola Adekoya, Temitope Kehinde Bamgbose and 'Niran Adetoro

Publish or Perish: Scholars' Awareness and Perception of Scopus-Indexed Journals as a Requirement for Career Advancement in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract: The “publish or perish” culture has become a defining factor in academic career progression worldwide, and Nigerian universities are no exception. In response to concerns about research quality and the rise of predatory publishing, many Nigerian institutions have mandated Scopus-indexed journal publications as a key requirement for tenure and promotion. This study examines Nigerian scholars' awareness, perceptions, and experiences regarding this policy, as well as its impact on research excellence and career advancement. Using a mixed-methods approach, data was collected from academics across federal, state, and private universities in Nigeria. The findings indicate widespread awareness of the Scopus publication requirement but reveal diverse perceptions regarding its fairness and feasibility. The study also revealed that journal articles happened to be the most important types of scholarly outputs for appointment and promotion of academic staff in Nigerian universities. While, many scholars acknowledge Scopus-indexed journals' potential to enhance research quality and institutional rankings, concerns persist about academic freedom, financial constraints, and inequities between STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, and non-STEM disciplines. Additionally, the study finds that institutional incentives for publishing in Scopus-indexed journals remain inconsistent, with federal universities offering more recognition-based rewards, while private universities provide financial incentives. However, a significant proportion of respondents reported the absence of any formal incentives, highlighting a major gap in research support. Notwithstanding, the Analysis of Variance results show a statistically significant difference in perceptions of incentives among respondents from federal, state and private universities. The study concludes that while the Scopus-indexing requirement has the potential to improve research standards, its

*Corresponding author: **Idowu Adegbilero-Iwari**, PhD, Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria, E-mail: adegbileroii@abuad.edu.ng.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1689-4913>

Olabode Olajide, PhD, Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria, E-mail: olabode.olajide@fuoye.edu.ng. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9963-3825>

Nkeiru Amauche Emezie, PhD, Federal University of Technology Owerri, Owerri, Nigeria, E-mail: nkeiru.emezie@futo.edu.ng. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3598-4428>

Sadiat Adetoro Salau, PhD, Federal University of Technology Minna, Minna, Nigeria, E-mail: adetoro@futminna.edu.ng. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7499-6985>

Joseph Kehinde Fasae, PhD, Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria, E-mail: kennyfash2000@gmail.com. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4383-8594>

Clement Ola Adekoya, Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria; and Federal University of Technology and Environmental Sciences, Iyin-Ekiti, Nigeria, E-mail: myclem10@gmail.com. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2044-7195>

Temitope Kehinde Bamgbose, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, USA, E-mail: Tbamgb1@lsu.edu. <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2883-3222>

'Niran Adetoro, PhD, Department of Library and Information Science, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ijebu-Ode, Nigeria, E-mail: adetoroaa@tasued.edu.ng. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1828-0317>

effectiveness depends on addressing disciplinary disparities, financial barriers, and institutional support structures. To optimize the policy's benefits, Nigerian universities should implement structured incentives, research funding programmes, and mentorship initiatives to support scholars, particularly early-career researchers and those in underfunded institutions.

Keywords: academic publishing pressure; higher education policy; publish or perish; Scopus-indexed journals; Nigerian universities; academic career advancement

1 Background to the Research

Over the years, research and communication of the same are core career devotions of university scholars. The practices have become entrenched and without carrying those out the scholars' career path would be jeopardized. This situation is widely known as 'publish or perish'. The parlance connotes it is either a university scholar communicates his research findings or loses his status or job as a university worker. According to Asemhe (2025), it translates to the belief in academics that many scholars must always publish their work in reputable journals to support and advance their careers. It could also be through other various research communication medium such as pre-prints, books, and conference proceedings among others. Research communication and assessment have been subject to reforms over the years across different countries and institutions.

In this vein, the Nigerian higher education system has witnessed significant reforms aimed at enhancing research output and academic excellence. One such reform is the adoption of compulsory publication in Scopus-indexed journals as a key performance indicator for academic staff career advancement (Federal Ministry of Education 2025). This policy aims to promote research excellence, especially in the wake of dubious practices that have become accustomed to research communication. This trend is emphasized by the famed predatory publishing milieu that has gripped academia since the advent of the open-access movement. Predatory journals or publishers churn out unverified scientific claims that boycotted the usual peer-vetting practice of peer review and other quality assurance mechanisms that guarantee ethical publishing. This they do to obtain money in exchange for rapid publication of research for which many unsuspecting authors fall especially in developing countries. The rise of predatory publishing are not unconnected with the pressure of publish or perish. The pressure to publish papers regardless of the actual quality or innovativeness of that work, has resulted in burnout, questionable research practices, elitist hierarchies in which only a select few with access to resources and mentorship could expect to do well, etc. (Jamil 2025).

To guarantee research excellence, however, the policy requiring Scopus-indexed journals have been brought to the fore of research assessment in Nigerian universities but its implications on Nigerian academics' career progression and research output are not yet fully understood. It is considered important for a study as this to assess Nigerian scholars' general awareness and perception of this nascent policy shift on their research assessment. The Nigerian government has emphasized the need for universities to produce high-quality research that contributes to national development. In response, universities have adopted various strategies to enhance research output, including the compulsory publication in Scopus-indexed journals (Wardat and AlAli 2025). Nigerian scholars are encouraged by the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) to register in Scopus to enhance their visibility in the international arena (Idiedo and Okeji 2022).

Scopus is a leading database of peer-reviewed literature, and publication in Scopus-indexed journals is considered a benchmark of research excellence. Researchers in developing countries, including Nigeria, often face pressures to publish in Scopus-indexed journals due to their perceived prestige, despite facing substantial challenges (Okolie and Nwokolobia 2025).

However, Nigerian universities still face challenges in producing high-quality research that contributes to global knowledge and addresses local needs. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the impact of compulsory Scopus publication on Nigerian academics' career progression, research excellence, and identify strategies to optimize its benefits.

1.1 Problem Statement

Despite the growing adoption of the policy of accepting Scopus-indexed publication as a key performance indicator for academic staff in Nigerian universities (Atah et al. 2024), there is a paucity of empirical evidence on its impact on research excellence and career progression. This raises concerns about the effectiveness of this policy in fostering a culture of research excellence, promoting academic career advancement, and addressing the unique challenges such as high publication cost faced by Nigerian academics in publishing research in high impact journals (Okolie and Nwokolobia 2025). Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the impact of compulsory Scopus publication on research excellence and career progression for Nigerian academics, with a view to informing evidence-based policy decisions and promoting research excellence in Nigerian universities.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What is the prevalence of “Publish or Perish” maxim in Nigerian universities?
2. What is the extent of importance of various types of scholarly outputs for the appointment and promotion of career advancement academic staff in Nigerian Universities?
3. What is the perception of the practice of accepting only Scopus-indexed journals for tenure appointment and assessment for promotion of academic staff?
4. What incentivisation practices do universities employ to encourage publishing in Scopus-indexed journals?

1.3 Research Hypotheses

H₀1: There is no significant difference in the incentivisation practices that universities employ to encourage publishing in Scopus-indexed journals.

H₀2: There is no significant difference in the extent of importance of various types of scholarly outputs for the appointment and promotion of career advancement academic staff in Nigerian Universities.

2 Literature Review

A review of related literature to awareness of Scopus-indexed journals in Nigerian academia, perceptions of Scopus-indexed journals and career advancement; and challenges faced by Nigerian scholars is conducted. Existing literature and empirical findings highlight the key roles, challenges associated with Scopus-driven promotional criteria, including financial constraints, academic stress, ethical dilemmas, and the marginalization of local research priorities, as well as the impact of indexing databases in scholarly publishing.

2.1 Institutional Publishing Expectations

The global use of research outputs to rank schools has become increasingly critical in leading academic rankings, visibility, and productivity. Research is vital to the growth of a country, as well as for the whole of society, especially for teachers in knowledge-based learning environments (Singh et al. 2024). This has increased the “publish or perish” culture prevalent among academics (Chirisa and Ngoepe 2024). This is more so that promotion and career advancement in Nigerian universities are linked, not just to the teaching quality and community involvement, but to the publication of scholarly articles in journals (Abdulumuni 2021). This is reinforced by the National Universities Commission (NUC) setting publishing requirements as guidelines in the promotion of lecturers from the rank of Lecturer II up to Professor and making regular research publication mandatory (Ogunode et al. 2024).

Institutional policies have been shifting focus from local journals to those indexed in databases such as Scopus, Web of Science and PubMed over the last few years. Demonstrable ability to publish in Scopus-indexed journals for Nigerian universities has become an important criterion for career progression as noted in Okolie and Nwokolobia (2025). This is because indexed publications are generally considered to reflect research quality, peer-review integrity, and global relevance (Waithaka et al. 2022). It strengthens the university standard, projects its visibility, prestige and global ranking. Notwithstanding the value of using indexed journals, the expectation have been reported to cause academic anxiety among scholars due to high rejection rates, stringent and often protracted review processes associated with indexed journals (Zhou et al. 2024).

Lecturers in many Nigerian universities face challenges, including low institutional funding, limited access to scholarly databases, poor internet infrastructure, and high article processing charges, which make it difficult to meet publishing expectations (Lund et al. 2023). As a result, critics contend that institutional publishing demands often prioritize quantity over quality, driven by academic stress, ethical concerns, and, in some cases, academic burnout. Atah et al. (2024) found that many Nigerian university academics recognized the importance of Scopus-indexed publications but did not understand the complex indexing process or the criteria for publication. Plus, scholars at rural or underfunded institutions often do not know about the journals listed in Scopus, which forces them to neglect opportunities to explore high-impact publication outlets.

2.2 Rising Global Requirement for Indexed Journals

There has been steady rise globally in the requirement for scholars to use indexed journals as outlets for recognised and credible research outputs. Publishing in these journals is a trend that has been woven into the core fabrics of global research communication and higher education space worldwide (Braine 2005). This is not unconnected to the satisfaction and impacts through achieved prestige derived from indexed venues by scholars and their institutions (Atah et al. 2024). According to Patel, “several academic institutions only recognise indexed publications, particularly for teaching and medical colleagues” (Patel 2019, p. 1). Rising elite countries in Asia and Africa such as China, India, South Korea, Hong Kong, South Africa and now Nigeria are particularly concerned about their positions in the highly competitive space that higher education in general and research knowledge production industry in particular have become (Chen et al. 2009).

This competitiveness exemplified by world university rankings necessitates that universities make frantic attempts to place highly first in their region and in the world. To this end, universities in some parts of the world have developed “institutional strategies and policies that encourage global exposure of local research” (Patel 2019, p. 1). The growing requirements to publish in indexed journals is one of such strategies and also a consequence of the world universities ranking schemes (Lee and Lee 2013) which some authors described as the “creeping impact of metrification” of science (Tung and McKercher 2017, p. 330).

Authors have reported changes in publication requirements from country to country with respect to venues where researchers publish their works. Lee and Lee (2013) linked the demand for indexed journals due to the need for Korean universities to find a footing in global scientific landscape as evidenced in ranking placements in world universities ranking schemes. The situation in Turkey is similar to that of South Korea where indexing databases especially Scopus is considered by policy makers as indicator of journals’ “high quality” and prestige (Krawczyk and Kulczycki 2021, p. 10). Similarly, in Taiwan, researchers alluded to policy changes on evaluation of scholarly publications which according to them is beyond “academic administration” and quality control of scholarship, but believed to be associated “with the political economy of knowledge production” (Chen et al. 2009, p. 207). In China, there is a growing trend involving the use of internationally indexed journals as the yardstick for evaluating the performance of Chinese scholars (Tian et al. 2016). The practice is akin to what is obtainable in South Africa where the ministry of higher education maintains a list of accredited journals where South African authors are allowed to publish their research findings if they are to qualify for government incentives (Frederick 2020; Hedding 2019). The incentives are financial payouts that authors receive as rewards for publishing in the accredited journals most of which are indexed.

2.3 Impact of Indexing Databases in Scholarly Publishing

In the global scholarly communication system, indexing databases are key tools. Scopus, Web of Science, DOAJ, and EBSCO Host index peer-reviewed journals with international editorial and ethical standards to gain greater credibility and visibility (Chadha and Jain 2021). Scopus-indexed journals generally have high quality articles because of peer-review and global readers (Dote Pardo 2025). Elsevier calls Scopus the “most comprehensive overview of the world’s research outputs,” and plans to use it as the biggest database of reliable research material (Elsevier 2020). These databases are used by universities and ranking agencies to assess the quality of research output at the state level, Scopus among African universities as most widely known (Uwizeye et al. 2022). Its concern with this indexing raises concerns about research colonialism – in that developing countries may find themselves pressured to conform to Western interests rather than address local problems (Mthombeni 2024).

While the increasing emphasis on Scopus-indexed journals continues to be applied by Nigerian scholars, it is difficult for the researchers to meet all of these requirements. But, some of the biggest obstacles identified in the literature are limited access to international resources, funding limitations and lack of institutional support. This varies with subscription barriers and publishing prices, but access to indexed journals is often limited by subscription barriers and high publishing fees. This is the major challenge facing African academics, especially Nigerians, since funding for research is very small (Mills and Brandford 2022). Hence some scholars seek predatory journals that exploit the pay-to-publish model without delivering credible peer review (Sjostrand 2025). This undermines educational integrity and further creates low quality research. This research, carried out by Olaniran and Okagbue et al. (2024) stated that Nigerian researchers have a primary challenge in publishing internationally in the fields of international journals, as the fees in international journals are often large.

Such difficulty, sometimes at its height, can negatively affect academic staff productivity. Atah et al. (2024) examined the educational challenges faced by African lecturers as their Scopus-indexed journals were not available. This study highlights the fact that Scopus-based promotional measures burden Nigerian scholars financially, professionally and ethically. They found that the journal’s high APCs and limited institutional support create financial burdens that exacerbate the inequality in career progression among early-career lecturers. Plus, the situation has also worsened the publish-or-perish culture, which has subsequently elevated stress and burnout and forced lecturers to focus on publishing rather than teaching or mentorship.

Many colleges do not provide adequate research mentorship programmes, which further exacerbate the difficulties junior scholars face navigating the academic publishing environment (Atah et al. 2024; Okoro et al. 2024), also note that English language proficiency, writing ability, and limited availability to training for publishing in high-impact journals increase the barriers to the publication of Nigerian students (Atah et al. 2024). For this reason many Nigerian scholars may focus on local journals that do not have international recognition, and may restrict their academic career.

Research grants can increase research output significantly. But, they are sometimes unavailable because of several factors such as knowing how the deadlines are, demographic characteristics, eligibility criteria and selection criteria – but few are known. Both of these challenges lead to the use of academics’ paltry salaries to fund their studies (Raji and Oyedeki 2021). Raji and Oyedeki view good salaries as important for quality research. The University would hire good scientists, and if salaries were in good shape, good researchers would be attracted to them, because this also discourages the Japa syndrome. Despite these limitations, indexing databases remain important for academic advancement, as they improve research visibility, citation metrics, and academic reputation (Majhi et al. 2023).

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

This paper adopts the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Davis (1986). TAM is based on two fundamental constructs: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). Perceived Usefulness in this analysis refers to the extent to which academics believe that publication in Scopus-indexed journals positively impacts their research visibility, citation value, and career advancement (Waithaka et al. 2022; Wardat and AlAli 2025). Perceived ease of use relates to perceived efforts to publish in these journals, such as difficult submission and review procedures, rejections or article processing charges (Zhou et al. 2024).

Aside from institutional policy requiring Scopus publications to be considered for promotion, academics find the process beneficial and manageable. This study relies on the TAM theoretical framework to explain the reasons and barriers to Nigerian scholars publishing in Scopus-indexed journals.

4 Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design and targeted the entire academic staff (lecturers and librarians), with a population of appropriately 100,000 as of 1st Quarter of 2025 (Ogwo 2025), across the 270 universities in Nigeria, including those in the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Using Raosoft's calculator (Raosoft Inc 2004), the sample size was estimated to be 383. Data was collected using an online, close-ended questionnaire developed by the researchers with Google Forms (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSee3Jjc0kw28a98D2J9X1QPACKHQLGPw0IA2N7dJYfcwTE0vw/viewform?usp=sf_link), which was distributed through social media groups (WhatsApp and Telegram), specifically for academic staff. The researchers used social media groups because there is no single central platform to reach all academic staff simultaneously. Thus, the researchers shared on these groups of their individual universities and also reached out to colleagues in other universities to share on these groups in their universities too.

Manji et al. (2021) noted that WhatsApp, as a medium for data collection, is suitable for a study of this nature, more so that majority of the academics today in Nigeria are technology savvy. WhatsApp, which “is an instant messaging service which allows its users to send and receive text and audio-visual messages in real-time, irrespective of their geographical location” (Mavhandu-Mudzusi et al. 2022), has been used as a medium for data collection by past studies (Adegbilero-Iwari et al. 2022). To maximize the response rate, the study adopted the Tailored Design Method (TDM) by Dilman et al. (2014) which emphasizes multiple follow-ups and personalized communication in survey distribution. The TDM approach, originally developed for mail and telephone surveys, was adapted for an online setting, ensuring that participants received the survey through multiple channels.

The first round of questionnaire distribution was conducted via WhatsApp group accounts of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) across various public universities and faculty WhatsApp groups of private universities in Nigeria. To accommodate more respondents, a second round of the survey was sent one month later. Additionally, reminder messages were sent three weeks after the second distribution to further encourage participation. To increase engagement, the survey link was also shared directly with academic staff via their personal WhatsApp accounts, and some participants were contacted via telephone. The collected data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

4.1 Response Rate and Limitations

A total of 212 academic staff responded to the survey, representing a response rate of 55.4 %. The low response rate may be attributed to the online nature of the survey, which often yields lower engagement compared to in-person

data collection. A similar study by Francese (2011) reported a response rate of 7.69 % (58 out of 754 respondents) in an online survey of TLU members, reinforcing the challenge of securing high participation in digital surveys.

5 Results

The results in Table 1 reveal the demographic information of the respondents. Across all university types, late-career staff were the largest group overall (105 total), followed by mid-career (65) and early-career (42). In federal universities, late-career respondents were the largest subgroup (67), followed by mid-career (35) and early-career (22). In state universities, late-career staff also formed the largest category (17), followed by mid-career (15) and early-career (11). In private universities, late-career respondents were also most common (21), followed by mid-career (15) and early-career (9). On faculty role by university type, there were equal totals of librarians and lecturers (106 each). In federal universities, 66 librarians and 58 lecturers were recorded. In state universities, 20 librarians and 21 lecturers were reported. In private universities, 20 librarians and 27 lecturers were recorded. As per publication count by gender, among those with 1–5 publications, 23 males and 8 females were recorded. For 6–10 publications, 17 males and 19 females were listed. For 11–15 publications, 20 males and 16 females were counted. For 16–20 publications, 18 males and 14 females were recorded. For those with more than 20

Table 1: Demographics of respondents.

Universities	Early career	Mid-career	Late career
Federal	22	35	67
State	11	15	17
Private	9	15	21
Total	42	65	105
Universities	Faculty (librarian)	Faculty (lecturer)	
Federal	66	58	
State	20	21	
Private	20	27	
Total	106	106	
Publication count by gender	Female	Male	
1–5	8	23	
6–10	19	17	
11–15	16	20	
16–20	14	18	
Above 20	28	49	
Total	85	127	
Qualification			
Bachelors	9		
Masters	76		
Ph.D./postgraduate medical fellowship	127		
Total	212		
Gender			
Female	84		
Male	128		
Total	212		

*Early career, 1–5 years; mid-career, 6–10 years; late career, 11 years and above (Field Work, 2025)

Table 2: The prevalence of popular maxim “publish or perish” in Nigerian universities.

S/N	Universities	True	False	Not sure
1	Federal	121	0	3
2	State	40	2	5
3	Private	34	4	3
	Total	195	6	11

publications, 49 males and 28 females were reported. In total, publications were attributed to 127 males and 85 females. In terms of qualification, most respondents held a PhD or postgraduate medical fellowship (127), followed by master’s degree holders (76) and bachelor’s degree holders (9). The total number of respondents by qualification was 212 distributed across 128 males and 84 were females by gender.

Research question 1: What is the prevalence of “Publish or Perish” maxim in Nigerian universities?

The data from Table 2 illustrates the prevalence of the “publish or perish” maxim among academic staff in Nigerian universities. A significant majority, 195 respondents (89 %), affirmed that this principle holds true in their institutions, particularly in federal universities, where 121 respondents agreed. This suggests that faculty members in these institutions are highly aware of the crucial role research publications play in their career progression.

Conversely, only 6 respondents (3 %) disagreed, indicating that, in some cases, academic career advancement may not be entirely dependent on research output. Additionally, 11 respondents (5 %) were uncertain about the impact of research publication on their career trajectory, reflecting possible variations in institutional policies or personal experiences.

The findings highlight that federal universities have the highest acknowledgment of the “publish or perish” culture, likely due to stricter research requirements and performance evaluation systems. Meanwhile, state and private university respondents also recognized this trend but to a slightly lesser extent. Overall, the results reinforce the notion that scholarly publishing remains a critical determinant of career growth in Nigerian academia.

Research question 2: What is the extent of importance of various types of scholarly outputs for appointment and promotion of academic staff in Nigerian universities?

The data from Table 3 highlights the varying levels of importance attributed to different scholarly outputs in the appointment and promotion of academic staff in Nigerian universities. Among the different research outputs, journal articles were overwhelmingly regarded as the most critical for career advancement, with 209 respondents (98 %) rating them as either very important (VI) or important (I). This underscores the emphasis placed on peer-reviewed journal publications in academic evaluation. Conference papers and books/book chapters were also highly valued, with a combined 180 respondents considering conference proceedings as very important or important, and 185 respondents assigning the same level of importance to books and book chapters. Preprint

Table 3: Extent of importance of various types of scholarly outputs for appointment and promotion of academic staff in your institution.

S/N	Statements	VI	I	MI	SI	NI
1	Preprint articles in (SSRN, ArXiv, BioXiv, AfriXiv etc.)	52	48	34	27	51
2	Journal articles	193	16	3	0	0
3	Conference papers/proceedings	125	55	23	3	5
4	Books/book chapters	129	56	18	6	3
5	Theses/dissertations	72	52	23	18	47

Key: VI, very important; I, important; MI, moderately important; SI, slightly important; NI, not important.

Table 4: Perception of the practice of accepting only Scopus-indexed journals for tenure appointment and assessment for promotion.

S/N	Statements	Early career	Mid-career	Late-career	Total
1	I am okay with it	6	10	7	23
2	I feel somehow about it	2	3	10	15
3	It confers some prestige on authors	8	5	8	21
4	It creates inequity between sciences-based (STEM) [<i>Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics</i>] and non-STEM (e.g., humanities, arts, law) scholars due to limited number of non-STEM journals in Scopus	1	6	8	15
5	It is an approach to curb predatory publishing	4	1	3	8
6	It robs me of academic freedom on where to publish	3	8	15	26
7	It will help assure quality of scholarly outputs in local and foreign journals	9	10	11	30
8	It will improve the global ranking of our local universities	10	7	23	40
9	It will stop the patronage of unindexed international journals	1	3	2	6
10	It will stop the patronage of unindexed local journals	1	9	14	24
11	Others- it is madness not only because of the unnecessary cost implication but also the quality of some papers published in the so-called Scopus journals	0	0	1	1
12	Others-it will do away with home-based journals of high quality	0	0	1	1
13	Others-the quality of paper is more important than if a journal is indexed in Scopus. Many journals are delisted from time to time on Scopus.	0	0	1	1
14	Others-not important	0	0	1	1

articles were the least important followed by theses/dissertations among the different scholarly outputs used for the appointment and promotion of academic staff in Nigerian universities.

Research question 4: What is the perception of the practice of accepting only Scopus-indexed journals for tenure appointment and assessment for promotion of academic staff?

The data in Table 4 revealed that the most important perception of the practice of accepting only Scopus-indexed journals for tenure appointment and assessment for promotion of majority of the respondents perceive is that it will help assure quality of scholarly outputs in local and foreign journals and improve the global ranking of our local universities.

Specifically, the perception of the requirement to publish exclusively in Scopus-indexed journals for tenure appointments and promotion among Nigerian academics is varied, reflecting differences in career stage and discipline. While some scholars acknowledge the benefits of the policy, others express concerns about its fairness, feasibility, and impact on academic freedom. A relatively small proportion of respondents (23 scholars) expressed full acceptance of the policy, indicating that it has not yet gained widespread approval. Meanwhile, 15 respondents conveyed mixed feelings, suggesting a level of uncertainty or discomfort with its implications. This hesitancy may stem from the challenges associated with publishing in Scopus-indexed journals, particularly for scholars in underfunded institutions or non-STEM disciplines.

The most widely acknowledged benefit of the policy is its potential to enhance the global ranking of Nigerian universities, a view supported by 40 respondents. Additionally, 30 respondents believe that requiring Scopus-indexed publications will help assure the quality of scholarly outputs, ensuring that research from Nigerian institutions meets international standards. Some respondents also highlighted that the policy could reduce reliance on unindexed local and international journals, with 24 and 6 scholars, respectively, supporting this perspective. Furthermore, 8 respondents viewed the policy as a means to curb predatory publishing, which has become a growing concern in academic research.

Despite these perceived advantages, many scholars raised critical concerns about the policy. A notable 26 respondents argued that it infringes on academic freedom, as it limits researchers' ability to choose where to publish. Additionally, 15 respondents pointed out that the policy creates an imbalance between STEM and non-

Table 5: Incentivisation practices in Nigerian universities.

S/N	Statements	Federal	State	Private	Total
1	My university gives recognition awards to academic staff that publish in Scopus-indexed journals	38	10	18	66
2	My university gives monetary rewards to academic staff that publish in Scopus-indexed journals	8	2	16	26
3	My university gives accelerated promotion to academic staff that publish in Scopus-indexed journals	10	2	2	14
4	There are special awards/rewards to publishing in Scopus-indexed journals in my university	11	0	4	15
5	None of the above is obtainable in my university	67	36	12	115

STEM scholars, as there are significantly fewer humanities, arts, and law journals indexed in Scopus, putting non-STEM researchers at a disadvantage. Further criticisms of the policy highlight its potential drawbacks. Some scholars raised concerns about the high costs associated with publishing in Scopus-indexed journals, arguing that the financial burden could disadvantage researchers with limited access to institutional funding. One respondent even described the policy as “madness” due to its cost implications. Others questioned the long-term reliability of Scopus indexing, noting that journals can be delisted from Scopus over time, and potentially undermining the credibility of published research. Additionally, concerns were raised about the possible marginalization of high-quality local journals, which could stifle the dissemination of research that addresses local and regional issues.

Overall, the findings suggest that while the policy is recognized for its potential to improve research quality and institutional rankings, it also poses significant challenges related to academic equity, financial burden, and freedom of publication choice. These concerns underscore the need for institutional support, particularly for early-career scholars and researchers in non-STEM fields, to navigate the evolving academic publishing landscape effectively.

Research Question 4: What incentivisation practices do Nigerian universities employ to encourage publishing in Scopus indexed journals?

The findings from Table 5 reveal the varying degrees of institutional incentives offered to academic staff for publishing in Scopus-indexed journals across federal, state, and private universities in Nigeria. While some universities provide rewards and recognition, a significant number of respondents (115) indicated that no incentives are available at their institutions. This result corroborates a study (Eyiolorunshe et al. 2017) which reported that 91.3 % of their respondents indicated lack of incentives as a major challenge faced by Nigerian researchers for publishing in quality journals. It further, aligns with existing literature, which suggests that inadequate institutional support for research is another major challenge for Nigerian academics (Olaniran 2021). However, the result agreed with the findings that both monetary and non-monetary incentives exist within Nigerian university system for research staff (Owolabi et al. 2013). On the kind of incentives offered by Nigerian universities, the result is further presented as categorised below.

5.1 Research Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the incentivisation practices that universities employ to encourage publishing in Scopus-indexed journals.

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	18.683	2	9.342	7.586	0.001
Within groups	258.594	210	1.231		
Total	277.277	212			

The Analysis of Variance results show a statistically significant difference in perceptions of incentives among respondents from federal, state and private universities. The F-statistic is 7.586, with a p -value of 0.001, which is below the 0.05 significance level. The p -value (0.001) means there's only a 0.1 % probability these differences occurred by chance. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. This result indicates that perceptions of incentives vary significantly by university staff group, suggesting that universities differ in their incentive structures. It may also mean that academic staff's awareness of incentives differs across institutional types. To further understand which specific type universities differ from each other, the data was further analysed using a Post-hoc Tukey test.

Multiple comparisons						
Dependent variable: RQ19INCENTIVES						
Tukey HSD						
(I) RQ4DEMO_UNISTATUS	(J) RQ4DEMO_UNISTATUS	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Sig.	95 % confidence interval	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
FEDERALUNI	STATEUNI	0.168	0.190	0.650	-0.28	0.62
	PRIVATEUNI	-0.686*	0.200	0.002	-1.16	-0.21
STATEUNI	FEDERALUNI	-0.168	0.190	0.650	-0.62	0.28
	PRIVATEUNI	-0.854*	0.237	0.001	-1.41	-0.29
PRIVATEUNI	FEDERALUNI	0.686*	0.200	0.002	0.21	1.16
	STATEUNI	0.854*	0.237	0.001	0.29	1.41

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Tukey HSD ^{a,b}			
RQ4DEMO_UNISTATUS	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
STATEUNI	47	2.00	
FEDERALUNI	125	2.17	
PRIVATEUNI	41		2.85
Sig.		0.703	1.000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed. ^aUses harmonic mean sample size = 55.900.

^bThe group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

The Post-hoc Tukey HSD tests revealed that academic staff at private universities perceived significantly better incentives for Scopus publications than those at both federal universities ($p = 0.002$) and state universities ($p = 0.001$). No significant difference was found between federal and state universities ($p = 0.650$).

H₀2: There is no significant difference in the extent of importance of various types of scholarly outputs for the appointment and promotion of career advancement of academic staff in Nigerian Universities.

ANOVA						
		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
RQ9RANK	Between groups	4.610	2	2.305	1.009	0.366
	Within groups	479.906	210	2.285		
	Total	484.516	212			
RQ10	Between groups	0.089	2	0.045	0.563	0.570
	Within groups	16.681	210	0.079		
	Total	16.770	212			
RQ11	Between groups	1.804	2	0.902	1.063	0.347
	Within groups	178.149	210	0.848		
	Total	179.953	212			
RQ12	Between groups	2.056	2	1.028	1.366	0.257
	Within groups	158.066	210	0.753		
	Total	160.122	212			
RQ13	Between groups	0.468	2	0.234	0.096	0.909
	Within groups	512.612	210	2.441		

(continued)

ANOVA					
	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Total	513.080	212			

All five variables show p -values well above 0.05, indicating no statistically significant differences between Federal, State, and Private universities in any of the scholarly outputs related to the appointment and promotion of academic staff career advancement in Nigerian Universities. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted.

6 Discussion of Findings

The study provides insights into Nigerian scholars' awareness and perceptions of the requirement for Scopus-indexed journals for academic career advancement in Nigerian universities. The findings confirm that publishing in Scopus-indexed journals is a key determinant of career advancement in Nigerian universities, with federal institutions enforcing stricter research publication policies. The study's findings reveal a strong recognition of the prevalence of the "publish-or-perish" culture in Nigerian academia. A striking 89 % of respondents affirmed that career progression in their institutions is largely dependent on research output, particularly in federal universities. This aligns with previous research indicating that academic promotions are increasingly tied to publication metrics (Aprile et al. 2021). However, the pressure to publish has also led to heightened academic stress, as scholars prioritise research output over teaching and mentorship (Atah et al. 2024). The increasing workload and demand for high-impact publications have contributed to burnout, particularly among early-career academics who face the dual challenges of meeting institutional expectations while struggling with limited financial and research support.

Countries like Canada, on the other hand, as stressed by (Rice et al. 2020) adopt broader promotion criteria that balance research quality, education, service, and leadership, without requiring a single indexing database. India also supports publication in indexed journals under the UGC and institutional guidelines, but the requirements vary by discipline and institution. As in Kenyan and South African universities, study findings are assessed under broad definitions of qualifications and experience. In South Africa, this model is tied to journal accreditation rather than indexing requirements (Frederick 2020; Hedding 2019). So, rather than Nigeria's strong focus on Scopus-indexed publications as an important predictor of career growth, these countries adopt more balanced, flexible promotion methods in which indexed research is just one of several markers of academic success.

The high prevalence of the "publish or perish" maxim among academic staff in Nigerian universities confirms that a large proportion of academics recognise the importance of publishing in Scopus-indexed journals though many may lack an in-depth understanding of the indexing criteria and publication process. This knowledge gap puts scholars in less privileged institutions at a disadvantage, making it difficult for them to strategically target high-impact journals. This aligns with the studies (Atah et al. 2024; Oladipo 2015), which revealed that awareness of Scopus-indexed journals among Nigerian academics is increasing but remains unevenly distributed. Senior academics and those affiliated with well-resourced institutions are more likely to understand the significance of Scopus-indexed journals, whereas early-career scholars and those in underfunded universities struggle with limited access to information and resources.

The study also found that journal articles were the most important types of scholarly outputs for the appointment and promotion of academic staff in Nigerian universities. These findings indicate that, while journal articles remain the gold standard, other forms of scholarly contributions still hold significant weight in academic assessments. This suggests the importance of peer-reviewed journal publications as a measure of academic assessment. More importantly, conference papers and book chapters were also valued for their importance. Conversely, preprint articles received a mixed response: only 100 respondents rated them as very important or

important, while 51 rated them as not important. This suggests that despite their increasing role in scholarly communication, preprints have yet to gain full recognition in Nigerian academia for promotion and tenure purposes. This may not be unconnected to the non-recognition of preprint in tenure and promotion assessment for academic staff in Nigeria.

Similarly, theses and dissertations were ranked lower in importance. This implies that while graduate research is acknowledged, it is not a primary determinant for career progression compared to journal publications and books. In all, the data reinforce the centrality of journal articles in academic career advancement in Nigerian universities, while also acknowledging the relevance of conference papers, books, and book chapters. In addition, and corroborating the above, the hypotheses indicated no significant difference between Federal, State, and Private universities in any of the scholarly outputs related to the appointment and promotion of academic staff career advancement in Nigerian Universities.

The result corroborates past findings that place academic journals at the top among other research publications. Bucchi and Trench (2021) alluded that journals are the most important scholarly communication outlets for scholars. Also, Ladipo et al. (2022) found that journal articles represented a higher proportion of Nigerian university teachers' research productivity. However, the lower recognition of preprints and theses/dissertations suggests that institutional policies may need to evolve to accommodate diverse scholarly contributions.

It is important to state that although preprints were the least important across the universities, Wang et al. (2025) are of the opinion that preprints accelerate innovation, expedite the dissemination of scientific knowledge into technological innovation and enhance the visibility of early research results in the patenting process, while journals remain essential for academic rigour and reliability. Similarly, Chiarelli et al. (2019) stated that preprints enable broader access to the scientific literature and increased opportunities for informal commentary.

The data in Table 3 revealed that the most important perception of the practice of accepting only Scopus-indexed journals for tenure appointment and assessment for promotion is that it will help assure the quality of scholarly outputs in local and foreign journals and improve the global ranking of our local universities. From the findings, perceptions of the requirement to publish exclusively in Scopus-indexed journals for tenure appointments and promotion among Nigerian academics vary, reflecting differences in career stage and discipline. For example, as the findings reveal, a relatively small proportion of respondents (23 scholars) fully accepted the institution-level norms, indicating that it has not yet gained widespread approval. Meanwhile, 15 respondents expressed mixed feelings, suggesting uncertainty or discomfort with its implications. This validates the findings of Olajuwon et al. (2023), who state that despite the growing emphasis on Scopus-indexed publications, perceptions of their role in academic career advancement vary, as journals are seen as essential for securing promotions, accessing research grants, and improving institutional rankings. While some academics believe the focus on Scopus publications marginalizes local research, places undue pressure on scholars, and fosters an exclusionary system in which only well-funded researchers can thrive (Oladipo 2015).

Furthermore, the findings indicate significant variations in the availability of institutional incentives for publishing in Scopus-indexed journals. While some universities provide recognition awards, financial incentives, and accelerated promotions for high-impact publications, a substantial number of respondents (115) reported that their institutions offer no incentives at all. This aligns with previous studies indicating that inadequate institutional support discourages scholars from engaging in high-quality research (Eyiolorunshe et al. 2017; Okolie and Nwokolobia 2025).

Recognition awards were the most commonly reported incentive, particularly in federal universities, while financial incentives were relatively rare; private universities led in monetary rewards for publishing in Scopus-indexed journals. This finding corroborates news reports that some private institutions, such as Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, have introduced financial incentives to encourage academic publishing (Nejo 2024). It also suggests that public institutions are trying to match the financial incentives of private universities with non-monetary incentives. However, this highlights a critical policy concern. Public universities are assessed by market-driven ranking metrics such as the Scopus rankings, yet they lack full autonomy over budget allocation to adequately incentivise publishing in Scopus journals. Publishing in most of these journals requires expensive article processing charges, which public university researchers may not be able to afford. Thus, the authors believe that the appropriateness of market-based metrics for public institutions should be reconsidered. It is

important to note that, while non-monetary recognition systems such as awards may be beneficial, they remain counterproductive to the visibility of scholarly outputs from the country. When researchers can't afford the high article publication charges (Adegbilero-Iwari 2024), they publish their articles as closed-access articles. Preprints are also not recognised as part of promotion and tenure requirements; thus the visibility of these outputs will further dwindle.

7 Conclusions

The study findings confirm that while publishing in Scopus-indexed journals is widely regarded as beneficial for research quality and global rankings, significant challenges remain, particularly financial barriers, academic freedom, and discipline-based disparities. These concerns align with existing literature, which suggests that a balanced approach is needed, one that promotes high-impact publishing while also recognising local academic contributions. To optimise the benefits of this policy while addressing its challenges, university leaders should consider balanced promotion that incorporates Scopus-indexed journals, high-quality local journals, provide financial support for publication fees, and have discipline-informed evaluation. These measures will enhance quality of research while reducing inequities, particularly among non-STEM scholars. Government bodies like the National Universities Commission and Tertiary Education Trust Fund should increase funding and established inclusive national norms for publication quality while academic staff should actively engage in research development, mentorship, and strategic publishing to increase visibility and advance their career.

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