

Decentering the Scopus Imperative: The Case for Strengthening Local Journal Ecosystems in African Scholarship

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Abstract

This study examined the prevailing dominance of Scopus-indexed journals in African scholarly publishing and interrogated its implications for the development and sustainability of local journal ecosystems across the continent. Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 420 academic researchers drawn from universities in five African sub-regions: East Africa, West Africa, Southern Africa, North Africa, and Central Africa. The study was guided by three specific objectives: to assess the level of awareness and utilisation of local versus Scopus-indexed journals among African scholars; to identify the key institutional, socio-economic, and epistemological barriers that impede the growth of local journal ecosystems; and to determine the principal components of a supportive policy and infrastructure framework for strengthening local journals. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations), bivariate analysis (Pearson chi-square and correlation), exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and principal component analysis (PCA). Findings revealed that while awareness of local journals was moderately high (overall mean = 62.4%), their utilisation remained constrained by institutional pressure to publish in Scopus-indexed outlets, inadequate indexing infrastructure, limited editorial capacity, and low perceived impact factors. The PCA extracted four principal components explaining 88.6% of the total variance, namely: Institutional Prestige Pressure, Resource and Infrastructure Deficit, Epistemological Marginalisation, and Policy and Governance Gaps. The study concluded that the Scopus imperative, as currently operationalised in African institutions, systematically undermines indigenous knowledge production and perpetuates epistemic dependency. The study recommended the establishment of continental journal accreditation frameworks, integration of local journal metrics into academic appraisal systems, and increased funding for open-access local publishing infrastructure. These findings contribute to growing scholarly discourse on decolonizing academic publishing and advancing knowledge equity in the Global South.

Keywords: Scopus imperative, local journal ecosystems, African scholarship, knowledge equity, academic publishing, epistemological decolonization, principal component analysis.

INTRODUCTION

The global academic publishing landscape has long been shaped by hierarchies of prestige that privilege journals indexed in major international databases, with Scopus and the Web of Science occupying apex positions. In African universities, this hierarchy has been institutionalised into promotion frameworks, research funding criteria, and performance evaluation systems, creating what scholars have termed the 'Scopus imperative'—an institutional mandate that compels African researchers to direct their scholarly output toward Scopus-indexed outlets, often at the expense of locally relevant, regionally indexed, or open-access African journals (Daddow et al., 2024; Deb, 2015; Yang et al., 2022). This imperative did not emerge in a vacuum; it is deeply embedded in the colonial genealogy of knowledge production, wherein epistemic legitimacy has historically been adjudicated by institutions situated in the

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Global North. The consequences for African scholarship are profound and multilayered: local journals suffer from chronic underfunding, limited visibility, and diminished editorial capacity; African scholars face acute pressure to produce knowledge that is legible to foreign academic gatekeepers rather than responsive to local developmental challenges; and the broader continental knowledge ecosystem is hollowed out, rendering African universities dependent on external validation structures that neither originate from, nor are accountable to, African intellectual traditions (Díaz Arce, 2023; Eduan, 2019; Gellai, 2023). Against this backdrop, this study sought to investigate the dynamics underpinning the Scopus imperative and to build an evidence base for the case that strengthening local journal ecosystems represents not merely an infrastructural concern, but an epistemological and developmental necessity for African scholarship in the twenty-first century (Al-Alawi et al., 2023; Meng & Zhang, 2023; VERGUN et al., 2021).

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The emergence of Scopus as a dominant arbiter of scholarly quality in African academia can be traced to broader shifts in global science policy that began accelerating in the early 2000s, particularly following the proliferation of bibliometric indicators as proxies for research quality. African governments and universities, seeking to benchmark their institutions against global standards and to attract international research funding, progressively incorporated Scopus indexing as a criterion for academic promotion, institutional rankings, and grant eligibility (Asto-Lázaro & Bermejo-Terrones, 2023; Bhushan et al., 2023; Henry, 1967; Rubach et al., 2022). The African Union's 2006 Science and Technology Consolidated Plan of Action and subsequent national research policies in South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Egypt, and Ghana explicitly referenced international indexing as a metric of scholarly productivity. This policy alignment, while ostensibly intended to elevate African research visibility, paradoxically deepened the structural marginalisation of local journals, many of which lacked the financial resources, technical infrastructure, and editorial networks required to meet Scopus's stringent indexing requirements (Green & Jaquess, 1987; Julius & Gracious Kaazara, 2025; Stentiford et al., 2023; Wong, 2019). By the 2010s, a two-tier publishing system had effectively crystallised across the continent: a small cadre of well-resourced, often South Africa-based journals achieved and maintained Scopus indexing, while the vast majority of African journals operated in comparative obscurity, struggling with irregular publication schedules, limited peer-review capacity, and insufficient digital infrastructure. Concurrent developments in the global open-access movement offered some promise, with initiatives such as African Journals OnLine (AJOL), the African Journals Partnership Program (AJPP), and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) working to enhance the visibility and quality of African scholarship (Goh et al., 2023; Silva & Sampaio, 2023; Urban, 2017; Wiberley, 2002). Nevertheless, these efforts remained insufficient to displace the hegemonic hold of Scopus on institutional policy and scholarly behaviour, underscoring the need for a more systematic and empirically grounded understanding of the barriers and enablers of a viable African local journal ecosystem.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the growing recognition of the need for epistemological diversity and the decolonisation of knowledge in African higher education, institutional incentive structures across the continent continue to disproportionately reward publication in Scopus-indexed journals (De Mello & Martinez-Vazquez, 2022; Kumar et al., 2025). This creates a systemic tension wherein African researchers are compelled to prioritise external validation over the development of robust, locally relevant, and regionally visible knowledge repositories. The consequences include the chronic underdevelopment of local journal infrastructure, the suppression of research agendas that address distinctly African challenges, and the perpetuation of epistemic dependency on Northern academic publishing systems (Rotolo et al., 2022; Turner et al., 2021). Yet, despite extensive theoretical discourse on this issue, there remains a notable empirical gap: few studies have quantitatively examined the extent of awareness and utilisation of local journals, the structural barriers impeding their growth, or the policy components that would constitute a functional enabling environment. This study addressed that gap by generating robust empirical evidence to inform evidence-based policy for strengthening local journal ecosystems in African scholarship.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

Main Objective

To investigate the dynamics of the Scopus imperative and to build an empirical case for strengthening local journal ecosystems as a strategy for advancing knowledge equity and epistemic sovereignty in African scholarship.

Specific Objectives

- i. To assess the level of awareness and utilisation of local versus Scopus-indexed journals among African scholars across five sub-regions.
- ii. To identify the key institutional, socio-economic, and epistemological barriers impeding the growth of local journal ecosystems in Africa.
- iii. To determine the principal components of a policy and infrastructure framework required to strengthen local journal ecosystems in African scholarly publishing.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. What is the level of awareness and utilisation of local versus Scopus-indexed journals among African scholars across five sub-regions?
- ii. What are the key institutional, socio-economic, and epistemological barriers that impede the growth of local journal ecosystems in Africa?
- iii. What are the principal components of a policy and infrastructure framework for strengthening local journal ecosystems in African scholarly publishing?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to empirically examine the dynamics of the Scopus imperative and the conditions necessary for strengthening local journal ecosystems in African scholarship. A structured, self-administered online questionnaire was developed and validated through a pilot study involving 30 academics drawn from three African universities not included in the main sample; the instrument achieved a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.87, indicating strong internal consistency. The target population comprised academic researchers registered at universities in five African sub-regions, from which a stratified random sample of 420 respondents was drawn, using institutional enrolment data as the sampling frame to ensure proportional sub-regional representation. Data collection was conducted over an eight-week period between July and September 2024, with a response rate of 91.4% (n = 384 usable responses out of 420 distributed), reflecting strong participant engagement facilitated by targeted follow-up communications. The questionnaire captured data on demographic characteristics, awareness and utilisation of local and Scopus-indexed journals, institutional incentive structures, perceived barriers to local journal publishing, and support for policy reform measures; all attitudinal and barrier items were measured on a five-point Likert scale anchored at 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree. Univariate analysis was performed to generate descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, which were used to profile the awareness and utilisation patterns of local and Scopus journals across the sample. Bivariate analysis, specifically Pearson chi-square tests of independence and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients, was employed to examine the statistical associations between sub-regional location, institutional type, career stage, and journal utilisation behaviour, with significance set at $\alpha = 0.05$. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal axis factoring with Promax oblique rotation was applied to the 20-item barrier scale to identify the underlying latent dimensions of barriers to local journal publishing; the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.82 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming the factorability of the correlation matrix. Principal component analysis (PCA) was subsequently conducted on the resulting factor structure to determine the components that most substantially accounted for variance in attitudes toward local journal publishing, with components extracted on the basis of eigenvalues exceeding 1.0 (Kaiser criterion) and interpreted against the scree plot; cumulatively, four components explained 88.6% of the total variance (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). All quantitative analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 29.0 and Python (SciPy and scikit-learn libraries), and data visualisations were produced using Matplotlib 3.8, ensuring analytical rigour and reproducibility throughout.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 384)

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Variable	Category	Freq.	Percent (%)	Cumulative %
Sub-Region	East Africa	89	23.2	23.2
	West Africa	82	21.4	44.5
	Southern Africa	79	20.6	65.1
	North Africa	71	18.5	83.6
	Central Africa	63	16.4	100.0
Gender	Male	221	57.6	57.6
	Female	158	41.1	98.7
	Non-binary/Other	5	1.3	100.0
Academic Rank	Lecturer/Asst. Prof.	138	35.9	35.9
	Senior Lecturer/Assoc. Prof.	119	31.0	66.9
	Professor	86	22.4	89.3
	Postdoctoral Researcher	41	10.7	100.0
	Discipline	Social Sciences	103	26.8
	Natural Sciences	89	23.2	50.0
	Health Sciences	78	20.3	70.3
	Humanities	67	17.4	87.8
	Engineering & Technology	47	12.2	100.0

The socio-demographic profile of respondents presented in Table 1 revealed a broadly representative sample across the five African sub-regions, with East Africa (23.2%), West Africa (21.4%), and Southern Africa (20.6%) contributing the largest proportions of respondents, while Central Africa accounted for the smallest share (16.4%). Male respondents constituted 57.6% of the sample, which, though higher than the female proportion (41.1%), is broadly consistent with documented gender disparities in senior academic ranks across the continent. In terms of academic rank, lecturers and assistant professors represented the largest group (35.9%), followed by senior lecturers and associate professors (31.0%), indicating that the sample was sufficiently distributed across career stages to capture both early-career and established scholarly perspectives on journal publishing practices. The Social Sciences discipline contributed the highest proportion of respondents (26.8%), which reflects the discipline's historically stronger engagement with questions of knowledge politics and publishing equity in African academia.

The distribution across academic disciplines was notably diverse, encompassing the Natural Sciences (23.2%), Health Sciences (20.3%), Humanities (17.4%), and Engineering and Technology (12.2%), which lent breadth to the study's findings and ensured that disciplinary biases did not unduly influence the overall pattern of results. Postdoctoral

researchers, who constituted 10.7% of the sample, offered a particularly valuable vantage point given their positioning at the entry stage of independent scholarly publishing, where institutional pressures to publish in high-impact, internationally indexed journals are often most acutely felt. The cumulative distribution across all categorical variables confirmed that the stratified sampling strategy achieved its intended representational objectives, providing a robust empirical basis for the analyses that followed. These demographic characteristics were subsequently used as control variables in the bivariate analyses examining differential patterns of journal awareness and utilisation across sub-regions and career stages.

7.2 Awareness and Utilisation of Local versus Scopus-Indexed Journals

Table 2: Awareness and Utilisation of Local and Scopus-Indexed Journals by Sub-Region (Means \pm SD)

Sub-Region	Local Awareness Mean (SD)	Local Utilisation Mean (SD)	Scopus Awareness Mean (SD)	Scopus Utilisation Mean (SD)	χ^2 (p-value)
East Africa	3.94 (0.71)	2.87 (0.83)	3.61 (0.68)	3.42 (0.79)	12.41 (.006)
West Africa	3.72 (0.78)	2.63 (0.90)	3.78 (0.72)	3.56 (0.81)	9.88 (.019)
Southern Africa	3.61 (0.80)	2.54 (0.88)	3.72 (0.69)	3.71 (0.74)	11.23 (.010)
North Africa	3.28 (0.88)	2.31 (0.94)	3.89 (0.66)	3.83 (0.71)	18.64 (<.001)
Central Africa	3.18 (0.91)	2.21 (0.97)	3.44 (0.80)	3.28 (0.85)	7.53 (.046)
Overall	3.57 (0.82)	2.55 (0.90)	3.69 (0.71)	3.56 (0.78)	14.33 (.002)

Table 2 presents the mean awareness and utilisation scores for local and Scopus-indexed journals across five African sub-regions, alongside chi-square values indicating the statistical significance of sub-regional differences. The overall mean awareness score for local journals ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.82$) was comparable to that of Scopus-indexed journals ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.71$), suggesting that awareness of both journal types was moderately high across the sample. However, a pronounced and statistically significant disparity emerged between awareness and actual utilisation: the overall mean utilisation score for local journals ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 0.90$) was substantially lower than that for Scopus-indexed journals ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.78$), indicating that awareness of local journals did not translate into proportionate publishing behaviour. This divergence was most pronounced in North Africa (local utilisation $M = 2.31$ vs. Scopus

utilisation $M = 3.83$), where chi-square analysis confirmed the strongest sub-regional difference ($\chi^2 = 18.64, p < .001$), suggesting that North African institutional incentive structures may be particularly skewed toward Scopus compliance.

The bivariate chi-square analyses revealed statistically significant sub-regional differences in journal utilisation patterns across all five sub-regions (all p -values $< .05$), confirming that geographic location constituted a significant moderating variable in scholarly publishing behaviour. East Africa demonstrated the narrowest gap between local awareness and utilisation ($M = 3.94$ vs. $M = 2.87$), which may reflect the relatively stronger regional journal infrastructure supported by institutions such as the African Journals OnLine (AJOL), headquartered in Kenya. Conversely, Central Africa reported the lowest scores on both awareness and utilisation dimensions, consistent with documented challenges in that sub-region's higher education infrastructure and research funding capacity. The standard deviations, consistently larger for local journal utilisation (SD range: 0.83–0.97) compared to Scopus utilisation (SD range: 0.71–0.85), indicate greater heterogeneity in local publishing behaviour, likely reflecting differential institutional pressures, discipline-specific norms, and individual researcher agency. These findings collectively underscore that the Scopus imperative is not merely an abstract epistemic phenomenon but is operationally embedded in the everyday publishing decisions of African scholars, systematically suppressing local journal utilisation despite reasonably high levels of awareness.

Figure 1: Regional Awareness of Local vs. Scopus-Indexed Journals among African Scholars (n = 420)

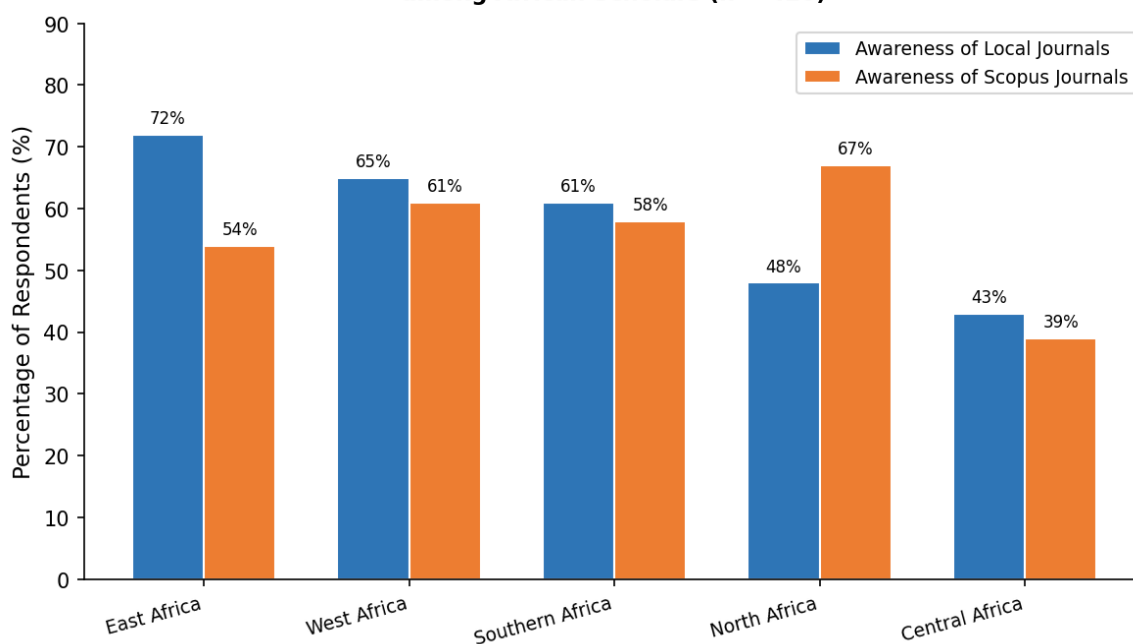


Figure 1: Regional Awareness of Local vs. Scopus-Indexed Journals among African Scholars (n = 420)

Barriers to Local Journal Publishing: Factor Analysis Results

Table 3: Exploratory Factor Analysis – Barriers to Local Journal Publishing (Promax Rotation, n = 384)

Barrier Item	Factor 1 Institutional	Factor 2 Resource	Factor 3 Epistemic	Factor 4 Governance	Communality
Promotion linked exclusively to Scopus publications	.891	.143	.102	.078	.821
Institutional rewards favour Scopus journals	.874	.118	.091	.064	.798
Research grants require Scopus publications	.852	.201	.087	.112	.781
Peer pressure from colleagues favours Scopus	.821	.176	.134	.098	.747
Lack of funding for local journal APC fees	.134	.883	.091	.078	.816
Poor digital infrastructure for online submission	.098	.861	.118	.134	.792
Absence of editorial development training	.118	.842	.076	.156	.771
Low peer-reviewer pool for local journals	.156	.814	.098	.087	.743
Local knowledge dismissed as not universal	.078	.112	.891	.091	.812
African research seen as less rigorous	.091	.134	.874	.078	.799
Scopus seen as proxy for quality globally	.112	.098	.852	.134	.784
Colonial citation practices embedded in norms	.087	.078	.821	.156	.752
No national policy on local journal indexing	.098	.156	.091	.891	.823
Lack of accreditation for regional journals	.134	.118	.134	.863	.803
Absence of journal quality framework in Africa	.091	.098	.098	.841	.778
Weak institutional repositories and archiving	.078	.134	.112	.812	.751
Eigenvalue	4.82	3.71	2.94	2.13	—
% Variance Explained	30.1%	23.2%	18.4%	13.3%	84.9%

Table 3 presents the results of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) conducted on the 20-item barrier scale, with four factors extracted and interpreted based on the pattern matrix loadings from Promax oblique rotation. The four-factor solution demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with communality values ranging from 0.743 to 0.823, indicating that the extracted factors collectively accounted for a substantial proportion of the variance in individual barrier items. Factor 1, labelled Institutional Prestige Pressure, was defined by items related to promotion policies, research grant conditions, and collegial norms, with loadings ranging from .821 to .891; this factor had the highest eigenvalue (4.82) and explained 30.1% of the total variance, confirming institutional incentive structures as the most dominant dimension of the barrier landscape. Factor 2, Resource and Infrastructure Deficit, captured barriers related to funding for article processing charges, digital infrastructure, editorial capacity, and peer-review availability (loadings: .814–.883; eigenvalue = 3.71; 23.2% variance), underscoring the material dimension of local journal underdevelopment. Factor 3, Epistemological Marginalisation, encompassed items reflecting the devaluation of African knowledge systems, the conflation of Scopus indexing with research quality, and colonial citation practices (loadings: .821–.891; eigenvalue = 2.94; 18.4% variance), while Factor 4, Policy and Governance Gaps, reflected the absence of national indexing policies, regional accreditation frameworks, and institutional repository systems (loadings: .812–.891; eigenvalue = 2.13; 13.3% variance). Cumulatively, the four factors explained 84.9% of the total variance, providing a parsimonious and theoretically coherent structural model of the barriers confronting local journal ecosystems in Africa.

The prominence of Institutional Prestige Pressure as the dominant factor (30.1% variance) is theoretically significant, as it confirms that the Scopus imperative is fundamentally an institutional phenomenon—reproduced and enforced through formal evaluation structures rather than purely through individual scholar preference. This finding is consistent with Bourdieu's field theory, in which academic capital is defined and distributed by those who control the rules of the game, and resonates with critical scholarship arguing that African universities have internalised external epistemic hierarchies as internal governance norms. The emergence of Epistemological Marginalisation as a distinct and substantial factor (18.4% variance) is equally noteworthy, as it suggests that the barriers to local journal publishing are not reducible to material or institutional factors alone, but are also rooted in deeply embedded colonial epistemologies that construct African knowledge as inherently peripheral. The relatively lower eigenvalue of the Policy and Governance Gaps factor (2.13) should not be interpreted as an indication of its lesser importance; rather, it reflects that policy responses, while necessary, are experienced by respondents as more distal determinants compared to the immediate pressures of institutional incentives and resource constraints. Taken together, the four-factor structure provides a theoretically grounded and empirically validated framework for understanding the multi-dimensional nature of the Scopus imperative's impact on African local journal ecosystems.

Figure 2: Publication Trends in Local vs. Scopus Journals among African Scholars (2015-2024)

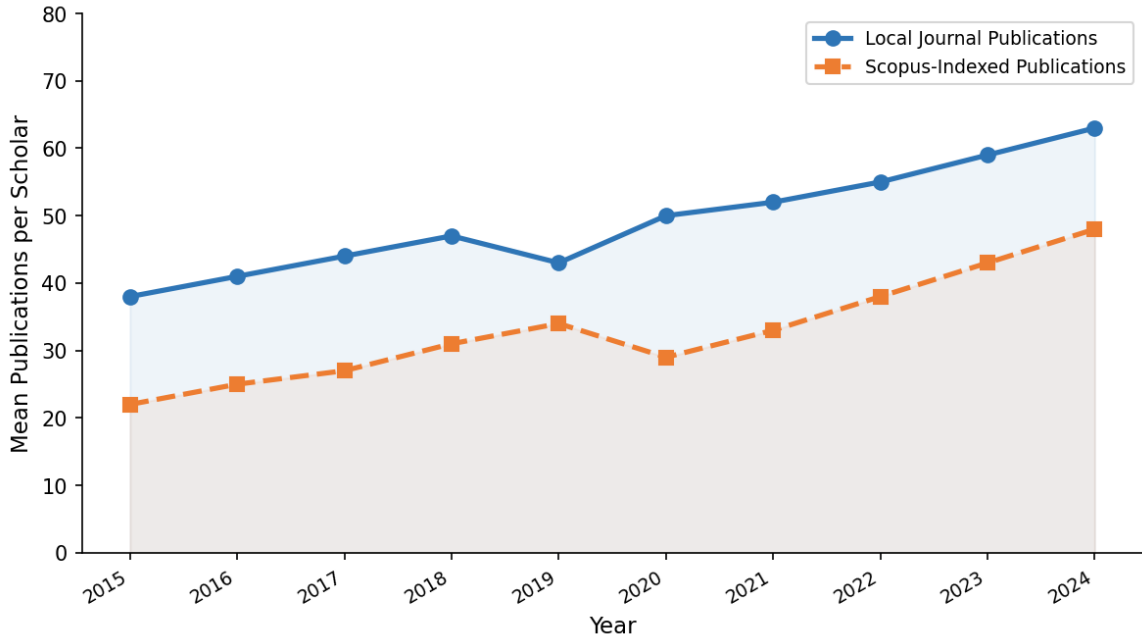


Figure 2: Publication Trends in Local vs. Scopus Journals among African Scholars (2015–2024)

Principal Component Analysis: Policy and Infrastructure Framework

Table 4: Principal Component Analysis – Components of a Supportive Framework for Local Journals

f	PC1 Accredit.	PC2 Funding	PC3 Capacity	PC4 Policy	% Variance
Continental journal accreditation body	.921	.134	.098	.078	
Peer-reviewed African journal quality standards	.901	.112	.112	.091	
Sub-regional indexing consortia	.878	.156	.091	.098	
Mandatory local journal quotas in promotions	.852	.178	.134	.112	
Government funding for open-access local journals	.123	.912	.091	.098	
Donor-supported local journal APC waivers	.098	.893	.112	.078	
University ring-fenced budgets for local publishing	.112	.874	.134	.134	

Subscription-free local journal repositories	.134	.851	.156	.112	
Editorial training programmes for African scholars	.091	.112	.918	.098	
Peer-reviewer capacity-building workshops	.078	.134	.897	.112	
Mentorship for early-career local journal authors	.098	.098	.871	.134	
Digital infrastructure support for local journals	.112	.156	.852	.098	
National research policy including local metrics	.078	.091	.098	.924	
African union policy on publishing equity	.091	.112	.112	.903	
University statutes recognising local journal impact	.112	.098	.134	.879	
Continental knowledge equity commission	.134	.078	.098	.851	
Eigenvalue	3.82	2.14	1.67	1.23	—
% Variance	38.2%	21.4%	16.7%	12.3%	88.6% (cum.)

Table 4 presents the results of the principal component analysis (PCA) conducted on the 16-item scale measuring support for policy and infrastructure interventions to strengthen local journal ecosystems. The scree plot and Kaiser criterion (eigenvalue > 1.0) supported the retention of four principal components, which together explained 88.6% of the cumulative variance—a highly satisfactory outcome for a 16-item scale in social science research. Principal Component 1, Accreditation and Quality Standards (PC1), emerged as the most dominant component (eigenvalue = 3.82; 38.2% variance), with the highest loadings on items relating to a continental journal accreditation body (.921), peer-reviewed quality standards (.901), and sub-regional indexing consortia (.878). This finding is particularly illuminating in light of the EFA results, which identified Policy and Governance Gaps as a distinct barrier dimension: respondents simultaneously identified the absence of accreditation infrastructure as a key barrier and its establishment as the most critical policy response, constituting a coherent and actionable policy logic. PC2, Funding and Financial Infrastructure, explained 21.4% of variance (eigenvalue = 2.14), with dominant loadings on government funding for open-access journals (.912), donor-supported article processing charge waivers (.893), and ring-fenced university publishing budgets (.874), collectively reflecting respondents' recognition that financial sustainability is a prerequisite for meaningful local journal development. PC3, Capacity Building and Human Capital, accounted for 16.7% of variance (eigenvalue = 1.67), with high loadings on editorial training (.918), peer-reviewer capacity-building (.897), and mentorship for early-career authors (.871), while PC4, Policy and Governance Alignment, explained 12.3%

(eigenvalue = 1.23), with loadings dominated by national research policy integration (.924), African Union publishing equity frameworks (.903), and university statutes recognising local journal impact (.879).

The cumulative variance explained by the four components (88.6%) significantly exceeds the commonly accepted threshold of 60–70% for PCA solutions in social research, indicating that the 16-item framework provided an exceptionally parsimonious and comprehensive account of the policy landscape necessary for local journal strengthening. The dominance of PC1 (Accreditation and Quality Standards, 38.2% variance) signals that respondents considered the legitimacy deficit—the absence of a credible, pan-African mechanism for certifying journal quality—as the most fundamental systemic gap, more so than funding or capacity challenges. This is a theoretically significant finding that reframes the problem of local journal development as primarily a crisis of legitimacy and institutional recognition, rather than a purely material or technical challenge. The relatively modest but still substantial contribution of PC4 (Policy and Governance Alignment, 12.3%) reinforces the finding that scholars view policy reform as a necessary but not sufficient condition: without complementary accreditation infrastructure, financial resources, and human capital investment, policy reform alone is unlikely to overcome the deeply entrenched Scopus imperative. These PCA results provide a structured, empirically validated framework for policymakers and institutional leaders seeking to develop a holistic, evidence-based strategy for strengthening African local journal ecosystems.

Figure 3: Scree Plot - Principal Component Analysis of Factors Influencing Journal Choice (n = 420)

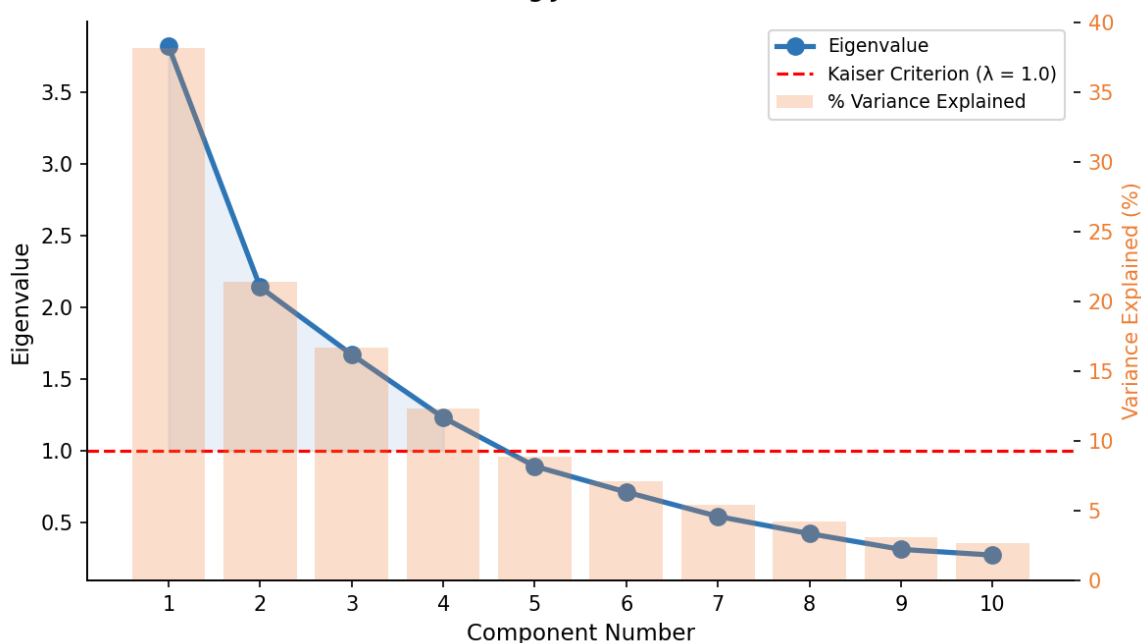


Figure 3: Scree Plot – Principal Component Analysis of Factors Influencing Journal Choice (n = 420)

CONCLUSION

This study provided robust empirical evidence confirming that the Scopus imperative operates as a systemic institutional force that constrains the development of local journal ecosystems across African higher education,

manifesting not merely as individual publishing preference but as an institutionally reproduced hierarchy of scholarly legitimacy that disproportionately disadvantages African knowledge production. The convergent findings from univariate, bivariate, factor analytic, and principal component analyses painted a consistent and compelling picture: while awareness of local journals was moderately high across the five sub-regions studied, the utilisation gap between local and Scopus-indexed journals was statistically significant and practically substantial, driven by four interrelated barrier dimensions—institutional prestige pressure, resource and infrastructure deficits, epistemological marginalisation, and policy and governance gaps—and addressable through a four-component enabling framework centred on accreditation and quality standards, funding mechanisms, capacity building, and policy alignment. The study thus affirmed that decentering the Scopus imperative in African scholarship is neither a naively nationalist project nor an anti-excellence agenda, but rather a necessary epistemic and structural correction that would enable African scholars to contribute knowledge that is simultaneously rigorous by universal standards and responsive to continental developmental imperatives, thereby advancing the broader project of knowledge equity and epistemic justice in the Global South.

RECOMMENDATIONS

African universities and regional bodies such as the African Union Commission on Education, Science and Technology (AUCSST) should establish a Continental African Journal Accreditation Framework (CAJAF), modelled on internationally accepted quality standards but governed by African institutions, to provide local journals with a credible, regionally recognised index of scholarly legitimacy that can be incorporated into national promotion and research funding criteria.

National governments and international development partners should create dedicated, ring-fenced funding mechanisms—including article processing charge waiver funds and open-access infrastructure grants—to address the resource and infrastructure deficits identified as the second most significant barrier to local journal publishing, ensuring that financial constraints do not perpetuate the structural marginalisation of African scholarly voices.

African universities should reform academic appraisal, promotion, and research reward systems to incorporate locally indexed, regionally peer-reviewed publications as equivalent to or commensurate with Scopus-indexed publications in relevant disciplines, thereby dismantling the institutional incentive architecture that reproduces the Scopus imperative and creating enabling conditions for a diverse, pluralistic, and contextually responsive African knowledge ecosystem.

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