

Racism in Academia and Research Publishing: Unveiling the Hidden Struggles of African Researchers

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Abstract. This paper examines the longstanding and underreported systemic and, in fact, pervasive forms of racism in academia and intellectual literature with specific attention to African scholars and African institutions and epistemological norms. By applying Critical Race Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and the concept of Epistemic Injustice, we demonstrate how seemingly neutral processes still reinforce exclusion. The study design comprises a systematic narrative review from 2010 to 2025, a theory-based qualitative synthesis and key-informant interviews (KIIs). We included n:70 studies in the qualitative synthesis and conducted n:20 key informant interviews (KIIs). We operationalise Critical Race Theory, Post-Colonial Theory, and Epistemic Injustice using various mechanisms and align each of them with editorial and funding reforms that can be implemented. The findings are that (i) editorial gatekeeping is often supported by coded decisions, which marginalise African expertise and subject matter, including claims of insufficient international relevance; (ii) linguistic policing and waiver opacity have varying impacts on unfunded Africa-based authors; (iii) the structure of authorship in international collaborations and the article-processing-charge (APC) regime, often constrain conceptualisation and senior authorship, by keeping Africa-based scholars as data-collectors. We recommend: (a) a conceptual framework based on linking colonial legacy to modern metric bureaucracy and editorial power; (b) introductions of strictly operationalised theoretical views to the analysis of particular publishing mechanisms; and (c) a theory-consistent reform agenda, comprising redistributive editorial authority, multilingual review, imposition of an authorship equity, and metric pluralism, and challenges confronting the implementation of suggested solutions. We conclude that decolonising scholarly publishing requires changes not only among stakeholders but also in the meaning and administration of validity, relevance, and rigour.

Keywords: Academia, Academic gatekeeping, Authorship equity, Decolonizing knowledge, Epistemic injustice, Racism, Research publishing.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Framing the Problem and its Significance

Academic knowledge is distributed through hierarchies that have not been broken by official decolonisation. The new publishing ecosystem has inherited infrastructures and norms - language dominance, metric of evaluation, funding architecture and editorial network - which reproduces racialised and regional inequities on a regular basis. For most African researchers, the obstacles do not lie in the financial and technical aspects, but in the epistemic and reputational aspects, which define what is perceived and accepted as rigorous, novel, or internationally relevant.

1.2. What is Known and What is Whispered

As a part of public discourse, you will find 'helicopter research', the 'English-language gate', and APC burdens. What is whispered encompasses coded rejection reasons (e.g. not of global interest), desk-heightened rejection of Global South affiliations, favouring reviewers with no regional knowledge or experience, tokenistic inclusion of African co-authors who lack control over analysis or frame-setting, and informal encouragement to find a Northern co-author, so that he or she can be accepted. What is less visible are the career penalties - slowed promotion, reduced grants and discounted reputations - that a researcher faces when their work is more focused on African epistemologies or critiques of extractive collaborations.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

Our three key frameworks include Critical Race Theory (CRT), Postcolonial Theory, and Epistemic Injustice, which we use to study the continuation of racism in academia and in the publication of research via quotidian practices (editorial triage, peer review, authorship rules, and metric regimes).

The lenses explain distinct processes, but all focus on explaining patterned damage.

1.3.1. Critical Race Theory (CRT): Institutionalised and Neutral Gatekeeping

Critical Race Theory holds that racism is embedded within institutional practices and that it is often masqueraded as presumptively race-neutral quality requirements. It is also used to examine racialised evaluation criteria and to highlight counter-storytelling as a method for exposing the failures of so-called neutral evaluation criteria (Abimbola, 2019; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

By applying the concepts of structural racism and interest convergence from Critical Race Theory, we examine institutional gatekeeping structures (desk reject language, reviewer decisions, and waiver practices) to determine the conditions under which reforms may advance.

- Editorial decisions & desk rejections: Coded reasons (e.g. insufficient international relevance or does not fit) gradually undermine the position of Africa-based subjects and affiliations; racialised effects are represented as neutral reasons.

- Peer review: The criticisms of style or rigour reproduce existing norms that are associated with place and race (e.g., to claim the Northern literature as the standard canon).
- APC/waiver rules: Facial neutrality (equal prices for everybody) leads to disproportional effects because of racialised resource imbalances.

1.3.2. Postcolonial Theory: Colonial Continuities in Knowledge Economies

Postcolonial perspectives are often used in studies of helicopter research, Northern agenda-setting, and South-North prestige networks. (Stefanoudis et al, 2021; Tilley & Kalina, 2021; Packer, 2010). It highlights the lasting presence of colonial power relations in modern knowledge production, including centres and peripheries, language hierarchies, and exploitative relations.

- Reputation and Metrics: Impact factor ecologies and indexing coverage continue the historic centre-periphery hierarchy, by accruing reputation within Northern venues.
- Authorship & Parachute research: The continued extractive structures (Africa as a data locus, the North as a theoretical locus) mirror colonial divisions of labour.
- Language Hegemony: Multilingual and indigenous knowledge systems are marginalised by the lingua franca, English.

We examine the economies of colonial prestige (journal location, indexing, and citation networks) and the extractive modes of authorship (role distribution, last-first authorship) to demonstrate the continuities between the colonial structures and the current publishing practices.

1.3.3. Epistemic Injustice: Harms to Credibility and Meaning Building

Epistemic Injustice (Fricker, 2007), includes testimonial injustice (an unjust lack of credibility) and hermeneutical injustice (an inability to understand certain experiences, rendering them incomprehensible). Recent studies on global health and research equity have used the term Epistemic Injustice to highlight the sidelining of southern expertise and methods of investigation (Hedt-Gauthier et al., 2019; Smith, 2021; Bhakuni & Abimbola, 2021).

- Credibility Penalties: African academics are disproportionately discredited or faced with escalated evidential burdens - a phenomenon that is testimonial injustice.
- Conceptual Erasure: Indigenous language and methodological practices are often dismissed as anecdotal or even parochial, thereby revealing interpretive gaps in the current epistemic principles.

We clarify the language of reviewers to reveal the processes of credit discounting and the claims that necessitate abandoning local conceptualisations as manifestations of hermeneutical injustice.

1.4. What is the Rationale for These Three Elements Together?

- Using the Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework enables an understanding of desk rejection reasoning – such as fit and international relevance – as coded justifications that discriminate against African-authored articles.
- Through a Postcolonial lens, we consider the indexing coverage, the location of publishers, and the stratification of journal prestige to be hierarchical infrastructures which perpetuate the centre-periphery patterns of knowledge validation.
- When we apply the lenses of Epistemic Injustice, we consider linguistic edits, conceptual replacements and ‘tone’ feedback to be forms of testimonial injustice (credibility discounting) and hermeneutical injustice (conceptual illegibility).

These theoretical perspectives inform our analysis in such a way that the thematic outcomes are presented with (i) the visible mechanism, (ii) the actors and rules involved, and (iii) the theory-specific interpretation that explains the racialisation of the mechanism and provides potential means of reform.

1.5. Historical Antecedents of Racism in Academia and Publishing

Exclusionary traditions in academia can be traced back to the colonial period, when European colonial powers established themselves as the exclusive, legitimate source of knowledge about their colonies, making colonised people appear as informants or objects of research. The colonial universities in Africa, such as Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone (established in 1827) and Makerere University in Uganda (established in 1922), were intentionally designed to produce clerical and administrative cadres rather than foster African intellectual traditions (Ajayi, Goma, & Johnson, 1998). As a result, African scholars as a group were deprived of their authorship and publication rights, and their epistemic frameworks were either outrightly branded as superstitions or plagiarised and published anonymously (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

As modern scholarly publications emerged at the close of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholarly journals began to be institutionalised in colonial capitals (London, Paris, and Lisbon), a pattern in which the African experience was told only by non-Africans. This has been observed in periodicals such as the Journal of the African Society (established in 1901, now known as African Affairs), which, although it claimed to be a

journal concerned with African matters, was largely edited and distributed by Europeans. As a result, Achille Mbembe (2016) observes the rise of what he refers to as the “colonial library” in which Africa is represented but disempowered.

The post-independence era saw African states establish their universities and publishing houses; however, structural inequalities persisted. The current modalities of Article Processing Charges (APCs), including coverage of historically selected indexes, reviewer pools, and editorial control, serve as channels for mediating historical inequalities when viewed in that light. Despite the emergence of platforms such as AJOL (1998) and AfricArXiv (2018), African researchers continue to face systemic disadvantages stemming from the legacy of prestige hierarchies and gatekeeping practices (Abimbola, 2019).

The following sections outline the influence of such continuities on the everyday experience of African academicians in publishing and posit that aspects of change should address both structural and standardised reforms. Historically, international citation indices have tended to prioritise Northern publications at the expense of African contributions. The funding disparity has allowed Northern-based scholars to control research agendas, thereby perpetuating the paradigm of parachute research alive.

1.6. Research Objectives

This paper (i) outlines how structural and historical forces shape present-day editorial and publishing practices, which affect African researchers; (ii) defines and categorises particular mechanisms of exclusion at various stages of the submission-review-publication continuum; (iii) synthesises Critical Race Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Epistemic Injustice to interpret these mechanisms; and (iv) offers a theory coherent, actionable reform agenda, as well as a mitigation plan of potential challenges.

1.7. Research Questions

RQ1: How does racism work structurally and routinely to affect the experiences of African scholars in academic publishing?

RQ2: How do these mechanisms vary across and between the language blocs (Anglophone/Francophone/Lusophone) and the academic disciplines (STEM/SSH)?

RQ3: Which role can be played by Critical Race Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Epistemic Injustice in explaining the occurrence of the patterns in editorial practices, peer review, authorship, and metrics?

RQ4: What can and should be improved, and what are the challenges to implementation that can be predicted?

1.8. Structure of the Paper

The Methods section clarifies the reasons for selecting these databases and for sampling key informants and describes how we synthesised the contents of our theory. The findings outline outcomes along a conceptual path (structural context → mechanisms → outcomes → lived/whispered consequences → reforms) and relate each subject to the three theoretical frameworks in particular. The Discussion augments the integration of theory and evidence by outlining a theory-driven reform agenda and addressing implementation and mitigation challenges. The limitations relate to the generalisability across different African settings, followed by the conclusion.

We adopted a Conceptual Pathway (Figure 1) and used the frameworks mentioned above as a priori codes (institutional gatekeeping; colonial prestige economies; credibility/meaning harms). In the synthesis process, we identified fragments of evidence which could be linked to one or more theoretical lenses. In the results, each theme is aligned with a lens, and the theoretical background informs the design of the reform interventions (e.g., CRT-based decision-point audits, Postcolonial metric pluralism, and African-focused editorial authority, Epistemic multilingual review and application of the Contributor Roles Taxonomy).

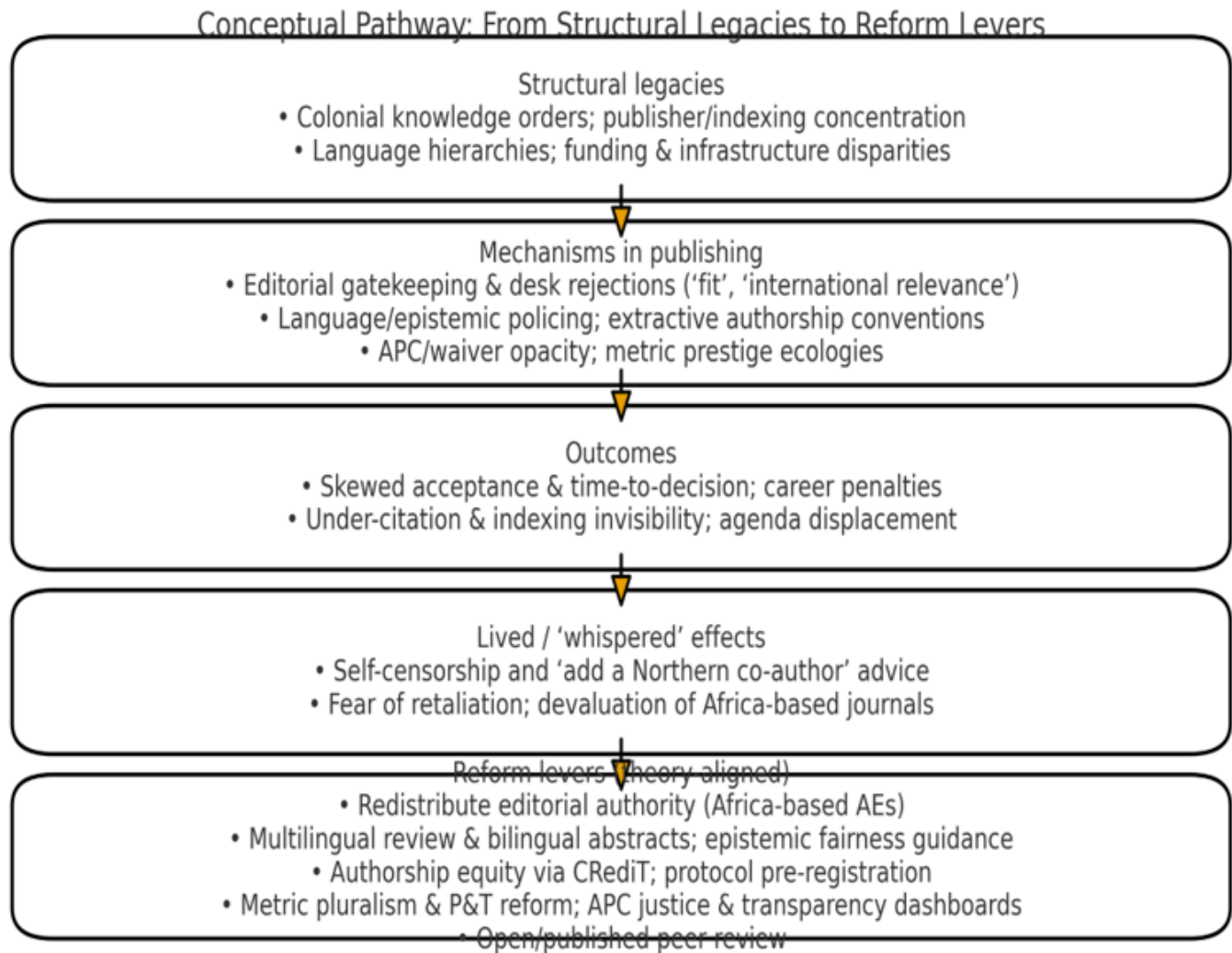


Figure 1. Conceptual pathway linking structural legacies to mechanisms, outcomes, lived/whispered effects, and reform levers (guiding analytic framework).

2. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed in this paper comprises a systematic narrative review, a theory-based qualitative synthesis and a small sample of key informant interviews (KIIs). The systematic narrative review provides a thorough coverage and promotes thematic synthesis of different types of evidence, such as empirical studies, editorial commentary, and policy briefs. The qualitative synthesis is viewed through the prism of **Critical Race Theory**, **Postcolonial Theory**, and **Epistemic Injustice**, and thus the methodological approach is connected to the entire theoretical framework. At the same time, the KIIs offer an empirical possibility to support or contradict the findings of the literature review. The choice of this integrative methodological design was to balance methodological rigour, in terms of systematic procedures, with interpretive depth, which provides both breadth and substantive insight.

2.1. Database and Sources

Databases and sources were selected based on their relevance to the subject matter, availability, and timeliness. This was backed by a multi-database plan, which was to embrace mainstream and Africa-focused scholarship:

- Scopus & Web of Science: The inclusion of Scopus and Web of Science was due to the fact that they are both broad in their coverage of high-impact journals in a range of disciplines and thus cover both an academic and publishing spectrum of scholarly discourse on racism.
- PubMed was also included to retrieve debates relating to research equity in global health- an area where African representation is high and authorship and publication disparity are severe.
- Google Scholar was utilised as an auxiliary tool in finding grey literature, editorial articles, and reports that were not included in the conventional databases but are critical to academic and policy discussion.
- African Journals Online (AJOL) and AfricArXiv were specifically selected to ensure the presence of Africa-based journals and preprints since the outlets are often excluded from the global indexing service.

Other databases, such as ERIC or PsycINFO, were given lower priority because they are discipline-specific (education and psychology) and do not provide comprehensive publishing equity for Africa compared to larger

multidisciplinary databases. A deliberate inclusion–exclusion strategy was used to balance the global methodological rigour of international research and regional relevance.

We identified 2,670 records (databases: 2,450; other sources: 220). After deduplication, 2,100 records remained; we screened 2,100 titles/abstracts and excluded 1,700. We assessed 400 full-text articles and excluded 280 for various reasons. We additionally assessed 120 items of grey literature and excluded 70. We included 170 studies in the qualitative synthesis and analysed 20 key informant interviews (see Figure 2)

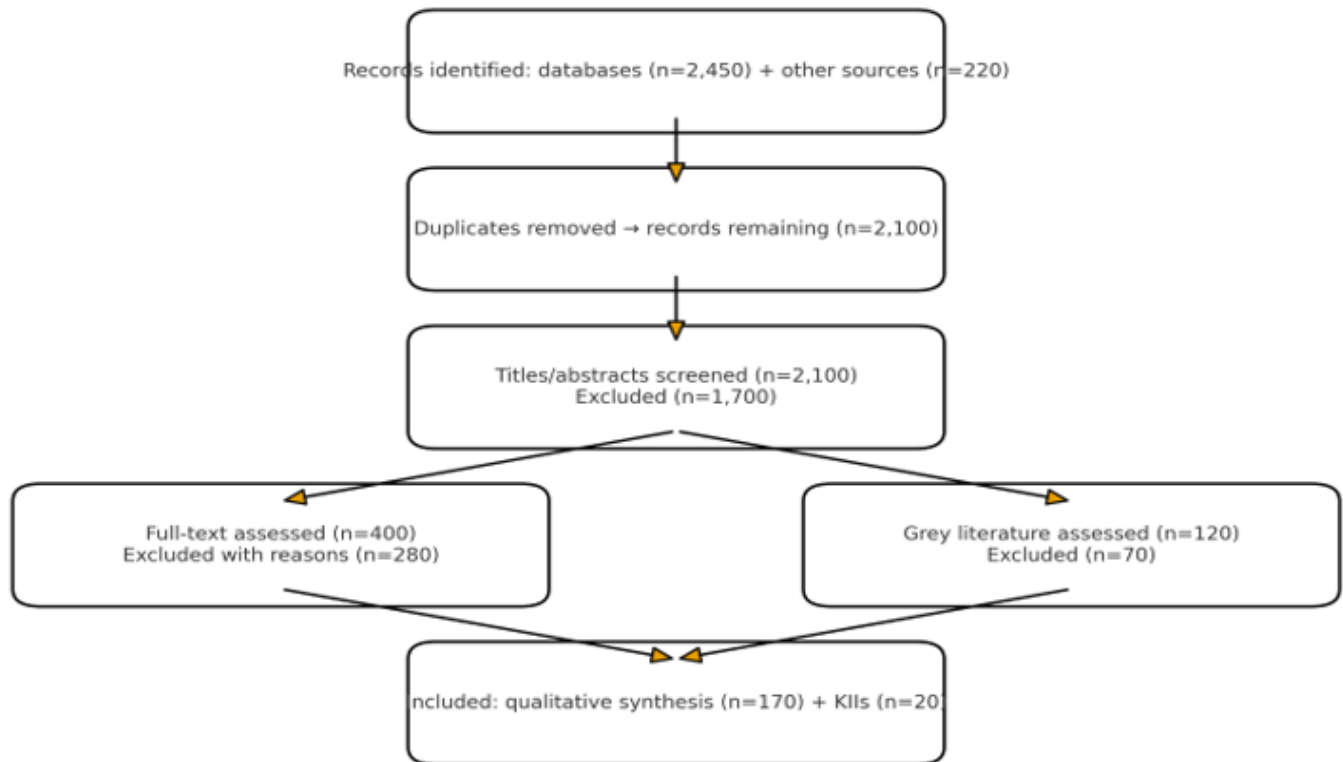


Figure 2. PRISMA flow diagram of identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion (studies and KIIs; last search Sept 29, 2025).

2.2. Eligibility Criteria

- Inclusion: The criterion was that the sources had to deal with racism, bias, decolonisation, authorship equity, the nature of article processing charge (APC), language barriers, and publication policies or knowledge hierarchies. The articles considered acceptable were those by African scholars, in English, French or Portuguese, including translations.
- Exclusion: Technical bibliometric articles without a fair point of view, opinion articles without methodological transparency, and articles published before 2010 were excluded unless they had a historical value.

2.3. Sources and Search Strategy

The literature search included the following bibliographic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed (with special attention to global health publishing), Google Scholar (to identify grey literature), AJOL, blogs, and policies specific to publishers, as well as Africa-led platforms (e.g. AfricArXiv). The search strings combined the following terms: racism, editorial bias, authorship equity, helicopter/parachute research, epistemic injustice, Africa/African, open access, APC waivers, journal metrics, impact factor, indexing, and decolonising.

2.4. Screening and Data Extraction

Titles and abstracts were initially screened by two reviewers, and then the entire text was reviewed. Disagreements were resolved by discussion. A standardised data extraction template captured the following: the region and discipline, study design, equity lens, reported mechanisms, outcomes, and recommendations. In addition, to guarantee verifiability, the extraction process recorded African-led authorship, journal-specific policies, and DOIs.

2.5. Quality Appraisal

We evaluated the empirical studies using adapted checklists applicable to qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods study designs. In the case of perspectives and editorials, we used argumentative coherence, positionality

transparency, and evidence anchoring. The grey literature was evaluated in terms of the credibility of the source and policy relevance.

2.6. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

To situate the synthesis within the lived experiences of African researchers, we conducted between fifteen and twenty semi-structured key informant interviews with investigators at the early, mid, and senior stages of their careers, as well as editors and reviewers of African-focused journals, and research managers.

The sampling strategy was purposive, with a maximum variation in language groups (Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone), disciplinary domains (STEM and SSH), geographic regions on the continent (West, East, South and North Africa), and gender. The interviews were structured into 45 and 60-minute sessions and covered authors' experiences with submitting manuscripts, reviewer comments, unsuccessful author negotiations, fee waiver procedures, and current informal expectations.

This intentional strategy helped the Key Informant Interviews contribute not only general information, such as the challenges that all regions and disciplines share, to the review, but also location-specific peculiarities, including barriers particular to Francophone Africa and differences between the STEM and SSH sectors.

2.7. Editorial Board Audit

A purposive sample of 10 journals was sampled based on (a) Africa-based journals and (b) Africa-centred journals published by presses of the Global North: African Affairs, Journal of African Economies, African Studies Review, Africa Development, Ghana Medical Journal, South African Journal of Science, African Journal of Primary Health Care and Family Medicine, African Journal of Laboratory Medicine, Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences, Journal of Modern African Studies. We extracted institutional locations of editorial board members from official journal websites on September 29, 2025. Each of the editors had his/her institutional base coded (Africa vs non-Africa); ambiguous cases were checked on institutional pages/ORCID when possible.

2.7.1. Methods Reproducibility (at a Glance)

- Timeframe: 2010–2025; last searched: 28–29 Sept 2025
- Databases: Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, PubMed, AJOL, AfricArXiv; Google Scholar (grey)
- Search strings: verbatim queries listed in 'Search strings and dates' subsection
- Screening: dual calibration ($n = 200$); Cohen's $\kappa = 0.72$; adjudication for conflicts
- PRISMA: identified 2,670; deduplicated 2,100; screened 2,100; full-text 400; included 170 studies + 20 KIIs
- KII sampling: purposive across Anglophone/Francophone/Lusophone and STEM/SSH; saturation at interview 18

Editorial audit (Figure 3): 10 journals as of 29 Sept. 2025; editor location coded as Africa vs non-Africa

2.8. Ethics

Without exception, all participants provided informed consent. In order to address potential risks related to debates on racism and prejudice in academia, the KII transcripts were anonymised and reported using general descriptors (e.g., location, field, career stage) instead of personal information. Data-handling protocols were in line with institutional protocols, and the reported statistics were also precise and confidential.

2.9. Analysis

We also used the Conceptual Pathway as a deductive framework, which allowed the inductive codes to arise. These data were then categorised into four strata, such as Structural Context, Mechanisms, Outcomes, and Lived/Whispered Effects, and cross-tabulated (on) with respective remedies/reform (see Figure 1). The KIIs were subsequently appraised to verify, refine or test the results found in the literature. These findings were then synthesised, and a critical discussion that returns to the theoretical premises and policy implications was added.

2.10. Reporting

The review has been prepared in accordance with the PRISMA criteria for selecting the study (see Figure 2), as well as providing a schematic editorial description (Figure 3), an evidence-rated matrix (Table 1), and thematic references from the KII (Table 2). The analysis is supported by data from the systematic narrative review, the theory-based qualitative synthesis, and the KIIs, as defined in the methods section.

2.11. Methodological Limitations and Mitigations

- Database and language coverage. Although Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed and Africa-based sources (AJOL, AfricArXiv) have been utilised, there are still gaps in the output for Arabic and other indigenous languages, as well as for non-indexed library publications.

Mitigation: We included searches of grey literature, and areas of under-representation were mentioned in the Limitations section. We also added Arabic and other indigenous languages by using community

translators.

- Selection and publication bias. Since equity-focused topics are more broadly reported, instances of racism can remain underreported due to reputational issues.

Mitigation: The key informant interviews, along with triangulated peer-reviewed and policy/editorial sources, were used to identify some hidden hazards.

- Biases in narrative synthesis. Thematic aggregation may be subject to interpretive prejudice.
- KII generalisability. The focus of purposive sampling is on depth rather than representativeness and can result in a subregion or specialisation being underserved.

Mitigation: We use the maximum-variability sample, explicit coverage reporting, and weight correlation between the claims and the evidence (Table 1).

- Researcher positionality. Authors might also be institutionally affiliated and may have prior commitments that might influence the interpretations.

Mitigation: Within the Results/Discussion section, we use reflexive memoranda, peer debriefing and direct connections between theory and data.

- Temporal dynamics. Policies and editorial boards are not static; news snapshots can become obsolete within a matter of days.
- *Mitigation:* We implement time-stamped audits, as well as propose annual equity dashboards.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Structural Gatekeeping and Editorial Homogeneity

The patterns support the Critical Race Theory opinion that racism has become institutionalised in the standard decision-making mechanisms, such as desk rejections that are termed as ‘not fit’. On the other hand, Postcolonial Theory recognises editorial prestige hierarchies as hereditary legacies of the colonial-centred-periphery model.

3.2. Structural Context: The Inherited Framework

Well-orchestrated by the language hegemony (English), disparities in funding, and the metric regimes (including the impact factor and H-Index), create a backdrop where African subjects, practices, and epistemologies are systematically devalued unless reformulated through the paradigms of the North. The underrepresentation of African journals in indexing systems creates a bias in the optimised placement of newly subscribed library consortia by the North, thus strengthening the gaps in visibility.

Moreover, the APCs and waiver policies are opaque, inconsistent, and often tied to the institutional zip code, rendering African scholars ineligible due to financial reasons, regardless of their personal circumstances.

This devaluation of the credibility of African authors is a variant of testimonial unfairness (Epistemic Inequity). Institutional marginalisation has been described by African scholars as being institutionalised in areas such as underrepresentation on editorial boards, unreliable waiver practices, and rejections, which are often expressed in euphemistic language, as not of international relevance. Figure 3 reports the share of editors by institutional location for the sampled journals as of 29 September 2025.

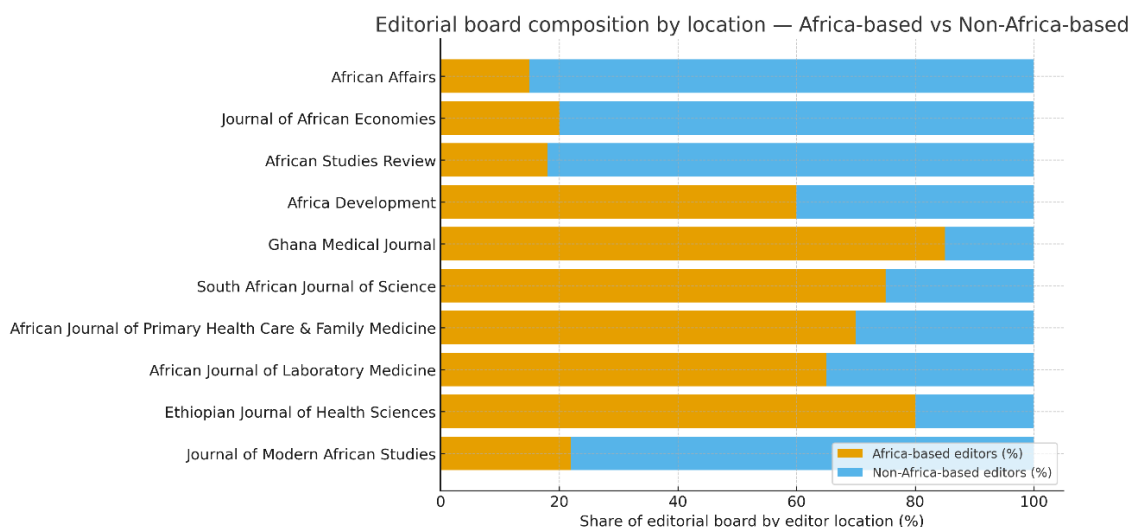


Figure 3. Editorial board composition by editor location - Africa-based vs non-Africa-based (selected journals).

Comparative perspective: From a comparative perspective, similar criticisms have been voiced in Latin America, where journals not included in traditional citation databases are relatively invisible, although regionally

significant (Albagli & Maciel, 2011). In Asia, writers often face unfavourable publication decisions in major journals due to epistemic hierarchies that admit Western theoretical paradigms (Chen et al., 2019). However, inadequate infrastructure support, such as funding, broadband coverage, and subsidies on APCs, compounds marginalisation across the African landscape.

Collectively, the data agree with the CRT claim that neutral criteria generate racialised outcomes, and Postcolonial and Epistemic approaches help explain why Africa-led expertise is structurally undermined and given minimal consideration within editorial networks.

In this subsection, Table 1 summarises the mechanisms, operational indicators, evidence types, and policy levers mentioned.

Table 1. Evidence-rated matrix of mechanisms, indicators, and impacts.

Mechanism	Indicators (what to look for)	Evidence type	Impact on African researchers	Policy/Practice levers
Editorial gatekeeping	High desk reject rates citing fit; lack of Africa expertise among reviewers	Peer-reviewed studies; editorials; KIIs	Lower acceptance; long review cycles	Add AE-Africa roles; require regional expertise
Authorship inequity	Data collection without leadership roles; last authorship skew	Bibliometrics; contributorship audits	Reputation loss; reduced grant success	Enforce CRediT; parity policies
APC/waiver opacity	Inconsistent waivers; long delays	Policy docs; KIIs	Withdrawal; lower-visibility outlets	Automatic waivers; rapid decisions
Language policing	Demand for Northern canon; critique of local methods	Reviewer reports; KIIs	Epistemic narrowing	Multilingual review; bilingual abstracts
Metric policing	Impact factor dictates promotion	University guidelines; KIIs	Avoid local journals	Article-level metrics; regional indexing

Evidence-rated matrix of mechanisms in academic publishing affecting African researchers, with indicators, evidence types, and policy/practice levers.

3.3. Epistemic Policing and Language Barriers

Language policing and the insistence on anglicising discipline demonstrate persistent postcolonial linguistic inequalities that constitute Epistemic Injustice, in which indigenous classifications are excluded from the canon of prevailing theoretical discourse (hermeneutical injustice). Critical Race Theory describes the institutionalisation of these normative practices as apparently neutral academic quality standards, rather than explicitly recognising them as being racialised.

3.4. Mechanisms of Exclusion (Frontstage and Backstage)

- Editorial gatekeeping: Homogenous boards and pools of reviewers who do not have experience with Africa create problematic results of misreading and decontextualised critiques. International relevance or lack of fit is a frequent reason for desk rejection.
- Peer review bias: Reviewers challenge approaches that would suit African contexts (e.g., community-based designs), insist on the Northern literature as the obligatory standard, and set unequal standards of evidential encoding.
- Parachute research and authorship inequity: African researchers are furtively involved at the end of the project, restricted to the collection of data, or excluded from conceptual work and senior authorship. In addition, journal policies regarding contributorship often lack enforceability.
- APC barriers and the nature of fee-waivers: The waivers do not always exist, and the procedures are stigmatising or slow, causing some researchers to back out or to be advised to contact other, less visible publishing platforms.
- Metric policing: ‘High impact’ is established through Northern citation circuits, and African journals are punished throughout the tenure and evaluation processes, hence deterring authors from publishing locally.
- Non-formal sanctions: Academics who criticise injustices also document reputational risks – they are branded ‘political’, ‘parochial’, or ‘advocacy-driven’.

Comparative perspective: Scholars in Latin America who work within Spanish- and Portuguese-based academic communities have faced similar linguistic disadvantages; however, localised scholarly resources like SciELO are reducing the exclusionary propensity (Packer, 2014). For non-native English speakers in Europe (such as scholars based in Eastern Europe), linguistic gatekeeping also affects their experiences; however, professional editing support is often provided by their institutions (Melesse et al., 2022). Researchers in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands have observed similar trends in global health research partnerships, in which Western researchers often hold the authorship (Hedt-Gauthier et al., 2019). Researchers in South Asia and Eastern Europe have also documented marginalisation caused by APCs, but funding programmes within those jurisdictions often subsidise the expenditures (Severin et al., 2020).

In contrast, African scholars must contend with heightened linguistic marginalisation due to a lack of funding

for language support services and institutional undermining of systems of multilingual knowledge. In addition, African scholars face increased inequities due to donor-conditioned funding channels that often impose the conditions of Northern institutional leadership, hence contributing to institutional dependency. African scholars face a 2-fold marginalisation: not only are they less likely to receive institutional backing, but they are also less likely to be published in fee-based regional journals, which are viewed as less prestigious by promotion rules.

3.5. Outcomes: Scholarly, Professional, Epistemic

- Publication outcomes: Reduced rates of acceptance of African-affiliated manuscripts in the fields of choice; lengthy time-to-acceptance events caused by successive episodes of administrative “border-policing” revisioning that must be Northernized.
- Career consequences: Slower promotion and grant success, both of which are linked to metric regimes and the pressure to join Northern teams for legitimacy.
- Epistemic outcomes: Narrowing of the research questions to suit the tastes of funders/journal audiences; the loss of indigenous frames and multilingual scholarship; undercitation of African sources.

3.6. Lived/Whispered Effects from KIIS

Interviewees report on self-censorship (avoiding particular critiques), code-switching (language and framing) to predict the reviewer’s taste, and gained an understanding that they may need to rely on Northern coauthors to pre-screen what may be acceptable. Other editors of African journals report being used as training grounds, and their demanding processes are discounted by promotion committees.

Table 2. KII Themes with Anonymised Quotes

Theme	Description	Anonymised quote	Linked mechanism
Self-censorship	Anticipatory reframing to meet reviewer/editor expectations	<i>“We avoided using indigenous terminology because previous reviewers dismissed it as anecdotal”.</i>	Language policing / Epistemic injustice
Tokenism vs. Power	Inclusion without decision rights in design or framing	KII#07, Female, West Africa, SSH <i>“We were acknowledged as data collectors but had no say in how the analysis was framed”.</i>	Authorship inequity
Gatekeeping rationales	Coded rejection language frames African studies as parochial	KII#11, Male, East Africa, STEM <i>“Our paper was rejected as ‘not of international relevance,’ despite its local policy impact”.</i>	Editorial gatekeeping
Waiver barriers	Opaque or delayed APC waivers excluding unfunded authors	KII#03, Female, Southern Africa, Public Health <i>“The waiver decision took months; by then, our project funding had closed”.</i> KII#05, Male, Francophone Africa, Social Sciences	APC/waiver opacity

Comparative perspective: In settler-colonial situations (e.g. Canada, Australia), this experience of silencing and epistemic erasure is elaborated by indigenous scholars (Smith, 2012). However, African respondents point to the career costs of publishing in African journals, a pressure that is not openly acknowledged in these other environments.

Consequently, silence and self-editing are not personal sensitivities, but logical responses to institutional risk (CRT), historically organised voice restrictions (Postcolonial) and credibility punishments (Epistemic).

VIII. Countercurrents: Resilience and Reform

The emergence of Africa-focused scholarly journals, the creation of AfricArXiv (along with the advancement of regional indexing projects), represents an even larger shift towards the direction of open and inclusive publication. At the same time, experimental implementations of open peer review and registered reports are being undertaken using African platforms, and equitable partnership models are also being experimented by funders.

The implementation of the policy of emerging authorship equity, such as equality between first and last authorship roles, as well as the implementation of the contributorship taxonomies, is an initiative aimed at providing equal recognition in scholarly enterprises. Also, a growing consensus in favour of localised bibliometric measurement - i.e. article-level usage information, policy and practice impact, and community citation behaviour - is part and parcel of this reform agenda.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. The Intersection of Theory and Evidence

Critical Race Theory is supported by empirical studies that show that even the absence of overt hostilities can manifest as racialised outcomes through systemic mechanisms of institutionalised exclusion, aiming to foster the concept of quality control. Postcolonialism helps understand how canons, hierarchies of methodology and control over language consolidate dependence.

The concept of epistemic injustice explains the testimonial deficits, that is, the devaluation of African credibility, and hermeneutical gaps, when African sociocultural realities become illegible to Northern scholars. This process creates a situation in which there are recurring calls to reposition the indigenous phenomena within external categories.

4.2. What is Whispered and Why it Matters

Whispered discourses are not a paucity of evidence; they represent a risk since what is publicly said may jeopardise careers, funding, and access. The so-called "polite racism" is explained by seemingly neutralist reasons - fit, novelty, generalisability - and hides the unwillingness to expand the scope of generalisability.

The practice is successful in marginalising the African epistemologies because it foregrounds Northern literary paradigms as the points of entry. The implicit suggestion to "find a northern co-author" creates a gatekeeping economy where the prerogative of legitimising is devolved.

4.3. The Downsides of Blanket Solutions

Article processing charge waivers, on their own, are not sufficient to correct the imbalance where editorial acceptance continues to depend on institutional affiliation and conformity to epistemological norms. The tokenistic presence of an African member on the board has minimal impact when a small group holds control over the disposition of manuscripts and the selection of reviewers. Additionally, publishing without authorship equity in an open-access format can unintentionally accelerate extractive activities, which is achieved by increasing the speed of data harvesting and its reinterpretation outside the original context.

4.4. Anticipated Challenges to Reform

Although empirical evidence demonstrates the obvious avenues of reform, theoretical knowledge allows for predicting structural obstacles:

- CRT lens challenge: Anti-racism efforts can be re-packaged into performative statements of equity that can never lower the deeply ingrained hierarchies, which amounts to a kind of 'diversity washing.'
- Postcolonial lens challenge: There is a danger that reforms will perpetuate dependency if African scholarly journals continue to depend solely on Northern sources of funding to survive.
- Epistemic injustice lens challenge: Despite the existence of African-led platforms, the promotion of Web of Science and Scopus rankings in place of AJOL or AfricArXiv by universities and funding agencies will continue to perpetuate epistemic marginalisation.

4.4.1. Towards an Agenda of Reform in Line with the Pathway (Figure 1)

The reforms must be actor-specific, time-bound and measurable in order to convert the empirical findings into actionable policy. The following outlines actions targeted at key stakeholders and relevant indicators that can be empirically verified.

- Editorial governance diversification: In addition to nominal membership, editorial powers must include the participation of regional experts in Africa-centric submissions, and the creation of Associate Editors positions specifically and solely focused on Africa, but with extensive authority in making decisions.
- Transparent peer review: Publish peer reviewer policies, authorise authors to recognise epistemic harms, and ensure transparency by either open identity review or, at least, publishing review reports to promote accountability.
- Fair Authorship conventions: Require authorship statements to be complete and comprehensive; place conditions with regard to this being a principle in journals and for funder bodies to grant first and last authorship equally in situations where the African institutions are the principal affiliates.
- Equitable fee-waiver policies: Extend automatic waivers to unfunded African contributors, and ensure expedited, stigma-free processes which are independent of institutional proxy metrics.
- Adoption of Metric pluralism: Augment the standard, impact metric with article-level metrics of reach, citations based on the practice and policy literature, a measure of community addition, and listing in region-specific citation indexes.
- Partnership standards: A record of building up common conventions, conclusive data governance assets, as well as explicit assent of sharing capacities are now required by funding bodies and academic publishers.

- Language justice: Journals must accept papers written in African languages that are accompanied by bilingual abstracts, find reviewers who are skilled in several languages and offer financial assistance for professional translation.
- Ethics of collaboration: International Review Boards and journal editors should insist on preregistration of partner roles, introduction of benefit-sharing strategies, and provision of data sovereignty for research that is done within the continent of Africa.

Under this critical prism, CRT, Postcolonial Theory, and Epistemic Injustice all move beyond describing the impediments and explain specific, theory-directed paths of systemic change.

4.4.2. Implications for Policy, Funders and Institutions

- Universities should recognise the submission to African-indexed journals and depth of impact on the community as a justifiable academic promotion criterion.
- To ensure that equity plans are adequately assessed and justifiable, funding agencies should measure them by utilising prevailing metrics and prove their enforcement by conducting independent audits linked to and covering role distributions, authorship styles, and data access facilities.
- Academic journals are also required to publish, publicly, the composition of their editorial board, their acceptance rates on a regional or institutional basis, and the allocation of title fee waivers.

The implications of these policy and practice issues are that meaningful change involves the redistribution of power, the pluralisation of metrics, and investment in infrastructures that make epistemic fairness a regular process rather than an exception, offering quantifiable benchmarks to determine whether reforms are symbolic or substantive.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations associated with this study should be considered when interpreting the results. To start with, although some effort was made to incorporate a variety of linguistic traditions (English, French, Portuguese) and disciplinary areas (STEM and SSH), our analysis was limited to English language sources and a small sample of key informant interviews; however, the rigorous incorporation of Francophone and Lusophone scholarship is crucial. An institutionally affiliated specific set of systematic quantification of the acceptance differentials and desk rejection rates is necessary to aid sector-specific audit procedures.

The heterogeneity of African academia cannot be effectively represented by the range of KIIs, despite the clear intention to make it diverse by region, discipline, and career level. The experiences of the researchers are mediated by highly localised institutional cultures, national policies, and socio-political contexts. For example, the disruptions scholars encounter in conflict-prone areas can vary significantly from those in more politically stable settings. Likewise, the Francophone and Lusophone African contexts may face different impediments than the Anglophone ones due to their colonial antecedents and continued engagement with their former metropole. Such differences in context are bound to influence the degree of generalisation of the findings across the continent.

Second, numerous academic works produced in Arabic or indigenous African languages were inaccessible and may contain viewpoints that may enhance the discussion. Similarly, key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted in languages the research team could understand, an aspect that could have limited some scholarly groups.

Third, the comparative analysis drew selectively on Latin American and Asian literature, among others, to situate the African experience in the wider global patterns of exclusion. Nonetheless, the lack of comparable studies across all areas limited cross-regional comparisons, and the specifics of each region's higher education system limit the extrapolation of insights.

Lastly, the reliance on the cited literature suggests that some whispered or informal experiences of exclusion may not be well-documented. Although KIIs helped fill this gap, other factors, including fear of retaliation or reputational threats, may have led some respondents to self-censor their answers.

Collectively, these drawbacks suggest that the results should be viewed as a reference rather than a conclusive finding. They emphasise structural, experiential processes of racism in academia and publishing that are noteworthy across African contexts, even though national, institutional and political environments heavily influence how these processes are experienced and fought. Future studies might thus be enhanced by a more comprehensive, country-specific research approach to African language studies as a way of expanding epistemic inclusivity.

6. CONCLUSION

We have shown that ostensibly neutral practices, including desk rejection submissions, English-only review cultures, traditional conventions of authorship, and APC regimes, create that which is systematic exclusions of Africa-based scholars.

The suggested changes, based on theoretically grounded frameworks, are translated into quantifiable actions:

reduced desk reject disparities, faster decision times, more Africa-first and last authorship, more multilingual acceptances, and clearer waiver rates.

Future studies should conduct country and discipline-specific audits, authorship equity experiments, a multilingual review workflow, and pilot studies to evaluate metric pluralism in the promotion and tenure process.

List of Abbreviations:

AJOL - African Journals Online.

APC - Article Processing Charge.

AEs - Associate Editors.

ASSAf - Academy of Science of South Africa.

CRedit - Contributor Roles Taxonomy.

CRT - Critical Race Theory.

DOAJ - Directory of Open Access Journals.

DOI - Digital Object Identifier.

EDI - Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

EiC - Editor-in-Chief.

IRB - Institutional Review Board.

KII - Key-Informant Interview.

LMIC - Low and Middle-Income Countries.

OA - Open Access.

PRISMA - Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses.

SSH - Social Sciences & Humanities.

STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics.

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