A Scoping Review of Two Decades of Research on Scholarly Communication and Social Justice in Library and Information Science in Africa

Monica Mensah Danquah

University of Ghana

https://doi.org/10.15641/978.0.7992.2561.7

Abstract

Scholarly communication and social justice have increasingly become central themes in library and information science (LIS) research, particularly in Africa, where systemic barriers to knowledge access and dissemination persist. This essay presents a scoping review of two decades (2004–2024) of research on scholarly communication and social justice in LIS in Africa, analyzing trends, challenges, and emerging interventions. Using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) Extension for Scoping Reviews Checklist, this study systematically mapped the literature across nine academic databases, retrieving an initial 4,406 records. After title, abstract, and full-text screening, as well as the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, 236 essays qualified for the final dataset analyzed to identify dominant themes and key contributions. The findings indicate that LIS professionals in Africa have played a critical role in advancing social justice through scholarly communication initiatives, advocating for policy reforms, and promoting digital inclusivity to bridge knowledge inequalities. However, significant challenges persist, including information poverty, limited research funding, linguistic inequalities, digital infrastructure deficits, and restricted access to scholarly information due to high publishing costs. The review also highlights successful interventions, such as African Journals Online (AJOL), the African Open Science Platform (AOSP), institutional repositories, and collaborative regional initiatives, which have fostered greater knowledge equity and accessibility. This study underscores the need to develop policies that integrate social justice principles into scholarly communication, to strengthen curriculum alignment, enhance regional collaborations, and invest in open-access infrastructure.

Keywords: scholarly communication, social justice, library and information science, scoping review, Africa

Introduction

Over the past two decades, scholarly communication and social justice have emerged as critical themes in Library and Information Science (LIS) research, particularly within the African context. The intersection of these two concepts reflects broader discussions on access to knowledge, equity in information dissemination, and the role of libraries and library professionals in addressing social inequalities. However, given that scholarly communication serves as the backbone of academic inquiry, that enables the sharing, evaluation, and preservation of knowledge across disciplines (Claassen, 2024), it sometimes worsens global inequalities, highlighting the critical need for social justice to ensure inclusivity and equity in the dissemination of knowledge (Ford & Alemneh, 2024; Abbott, 2024). The concept of scholarly communication has been generally defined as a system involving activities such as publishing research in journals and sharing ideas through online platforms (Mullen, 2024). More significantly, the concept of scholarly communication has been significantly influenced by digital transformations, open access movements, and evolving publication models (Adakawa, 2022).

Conversely, although there are many definitions of social justice as a concept with a focus on eliminating privilege, marginalization, and upholding human rights (Cooke et al., 2016), it also emphasizes the need to ensure that information systems, policies, and practices promote inclusivity, diversity, and equitable access to knowledge in the field of LIS (Mathiesen, 2015; Durodolu & Oladokun, 2024). Generally, equity in scholarship stems from the fact that access to academic resources remains deeply unequal worldwide (Oldac et al., 2024). Traditional publishing systems often favor researchers and institutions in the Global North, where the largest academic publishers are based (Collyer, 2018; Köbli et al., 2024). These systems mostly prioritize English-language scholarship and Western-centric research topics and journals, sidelining contributions from the Global South (Roh et al., 2020). Even when researchers from the Global South, particularly Africa, manage to meet the rigorous academic and editorial standards required to publish in high-impact Open Access (OA) journals based in the Western world, they often face another significant hurdle which is termed as high Article Processing Charges (APCs) (Nwagwu, 2023) These fees, which can range from hundreds to several thousand dollars per article, create a financial barrier that excludes many African scholars from participating in Open Access publishing, despite its goal of democratizing knowledge (Borrego, 2023; Nabyonga-Orem et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, in LIS, scholarly communication extends beyond simply providing access to resources. It encompasses advocacy for open access, promoting the visibility of marginalized voices, and supporting the creation of knowledge that is freely accessible to all (Jaeger et al., 2011).

Similarly, social justice in LIS focuses on ensuring that information services and resources are accessible to everyone, regardless of their socio-economic status, ethnicity, geographic location, or institutional affiliation. Indeed, open access (OA) publishing is widely celebrated as a transformative movement in academic publishing, that aims to remove financial barriers and make research freely available to all (Drescher, 2022).

Yet, while open access is expected to remove the cost of accessing academic materials, it does not inherently lead to equal participation or recognition in scholarly communication (Mullen, 2024). Several structural, economic, and systemic factors continue to create disparities in academic publishing and knowledge sharing. Thus, as Tennant and colleagues put forward, since each region worldwide faces unique open access challenges, initiatives must go beyond simply providing free content (Tennant et al., 2016). Instead, there should be an active promotion of more inclusive and equitable participation in scholarly communication, that addresses the specific needs of each region. For instance, recognizing African researchers' challenges, the 2023 Cape Town Declaration on Open Science advocates a continental framework to promote open science, ensuring equitable participation, research access, knowledge sharing, and academic inclusivity. That said, while LIS scholars have explored scholarly communication and social justice, existing studies remain fragmented. There is a lack of comprehensive research synthesizing findings across regions. This scoping review analyzes major themes, methodologies, and findings from two decades of LIS research in Africa. It highlights key trends, uncovers gaps, and proposes future directions. The insights gained will enhance understanding of LIS as a catalyst for knowledge dissemination and social transformation, fostering inclusivity.

Methodology

This review is reported in accordance with the reporting guidance provided in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) Extension for Scoping Review Checklist (Page, 2024). A scoping review method was chosen, because this type of review typically aims to map evidence on a broad topic (Khalil et al., 2024). The study follows the methodological framework described by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). The framework involves five-stages namely; (1) identifying the research question; (2) identifying relevant studies; (3) selecting studies; (4) charting and collating the data, and (5) summarizing and reporting the results.

Stage 1: Identifying the research question(s)

The research questions served as a framework for identifying, analyzing, and synthesizing relevant literature for this study. These were designed to ensure a comprehensive investigation of existing knowledge, to enable an in-depth understanding of the topic.

A total of four (4) research questions were formulated to direct the study, and to provide a clear path for assessing the current scenery, key contributions, challenges, and successful initiatives relative to scholarly communication and social justice in LIS in Africa. These are as follows:

1. What is the current state of scholarly communication in LIS, and how does it contribute to addressing social justice in Africa?
2. What specific roles do LIS professionals in Africa play in fostering social justice, particularly through curriculum alignment in LIS education?
3. What are the persistent challenges LIS professionals encounter in addressing social justice issues within scholarly communication practices in the African context?
4. What successful initiatives demonstrate the promotion of scholarly communication and social justice within LIS in Africa?

Stage 2: Identifying relevant studies

The foundation of any scoping review lies in the systematic identification, collection, and analysis of relevant literature related to the phenomenon under investigation (Dabengwa et al., 2023). As put forward by O'Brien and colleagues (2016), a thorough and well-structured literature search ensures that all pertinent studies, theories, and discussions are considered, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. This process not only enhances the credibility of the study but also ensures that the review remains relevant, informative, and aligned with the research questions. For this study identifying the relevant literature involved two (2) main stages namely the selection of databases, and development of a search strategy.

Stage 2.1 Selection of databases

Selecting appropriate databases is a crucial step in any scoping review, as it directly impacts the comprehensiveness and quality of retrieved literature (Karunarathna et al., 2024). Using diverse databases ensures the inclusion of relevant studies from multiple disciplines, offering a well-rounded perspective (Pollock et al., 2021). As depicted in Figure 1, for this study, nine databases were carefully chosen: Aluka, Emerald, EBSCOhost, JSTOR, Scopus, Wiley Online Library, African Journals Online (AJOL), Google Scholar, and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). This selection aimed to capture research across disciplines, ensuring diverse sources such as journal articles, conference papers, and book chapters were included.
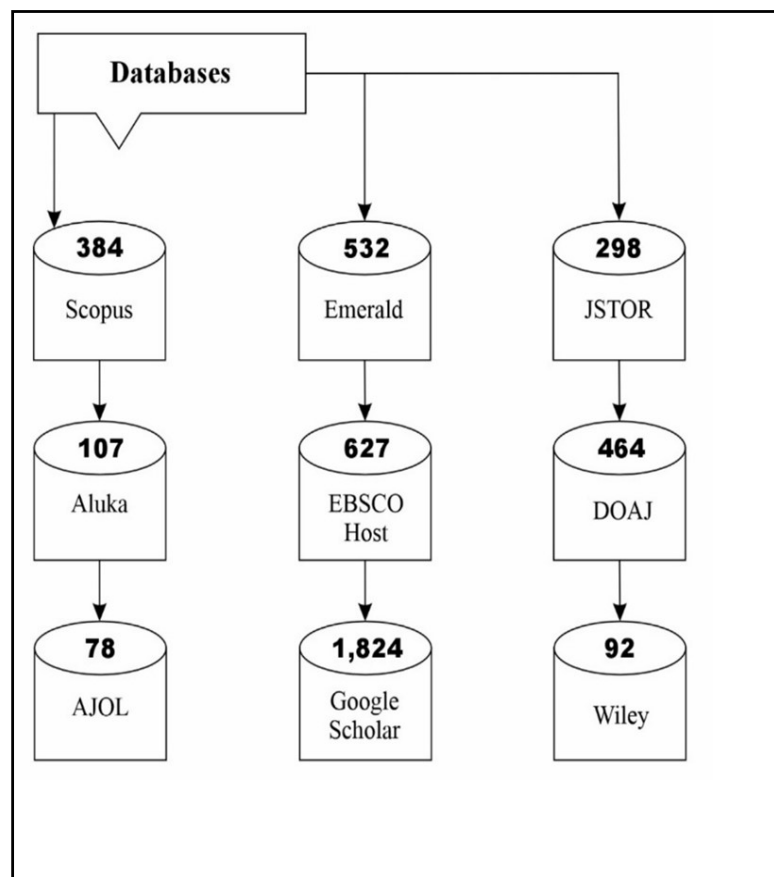
Figure 1: Selected Databases

Stage 2.2. Search strategy

To conduct a comprehensive literature search, a well-structured strategy was developed. First, key concepts central to the study were identified to ensure all critical aspects were considered. Relevant synonyms and alternative terms were then generated for each keyword to capture variations in terminology. Boolean operators ("OR" and "AND") refined the search, with "OR" combining synonyms and "AND" linking key concepts. Given database-specific differences in search query processing, customized search strategies were developed for each database. This ensured the retrieval of the most relevant literature while accounting for structural variations across databases, enhancing the study's depth and accuracy. The search strategy is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: General search strategy

Seach Lines	Search Strings
Search Line 1	"Scholarly communication" OR "academic publishing" OR "research dissemination" OR "open access" OR "scientific communication" OR "knowledge sharing"
Search Line 2	"Social justice" OR "equity" OR "inclusion" OR "access to information" OR "information justice" OR "information equity" OR "social equity" OR "decolonization of knowledge" OR "knowledge divide" OR "information divide" OR "digital divide" OR "knowledge gap" OR "information access gap"
Search Line 3	"Library and information science" OR "LIS" OR "libraries" OR "information science" OR "information professionals" OR "library services" OR "digital libraries"
Search Line 4	Africa OR "Sub-Saharan Africa" OR "North Africa" OR "African countries" OR "South Africa" OR Algeria OR Angola OR Benin OR Botswana OR "Burkina Faso" OR Burundi OR Cameroon OR "Cape Verde" OR "Central African Republic" OR Chad OR Comoros OR "Democratic Republic of the Congo" OR "Republic of the Congo" OR Djibouti OR Egypt OR "Equatorial Guinea" OR Eritrea OR Ethiopia OR Gabon OR Gambia OR Ghana OR Guinea OR "Guinea-Bissau" OR "Ivory Coast" OR Kenya OR Lesotho OR Liberia OR Libya OR Madagascar OR Malawi OR Mali OR Mauritania OR Mauritius OR Morocco OR Mozambique OR Namibia OR Niger OR Nigeria OR Rwanda OR "Sao Tome" OR Principe OR Senegal OR Seychelles OR "Sierra Leone" OR Somalia OR "South Sudan" OR Sudan OR Swaziland OR Tanzania OR Togo OR Tunisia OR Uganda OR Zambia OR Zimbabwe
Search Line 5	"Search Line1" AND "Search Line2" AND "Search Line3" AND "Search Line4" AND "Search Line5"

Stage 3: Selecting relevant studies

A comprehensive data retrieval strategy was implemented to systematically identify, assess, and include relevant literature. This step refined the selection process, ensuring that only studies meeting specific criteria were analyzed. The inclusion and exclusion criteria focused on studies that aligned with scholarly communication and social justice in LIS in Africa. Studies published between 2004 and 2024 were included to ensure relevance. Additionally, selected studies had to specifically focus on Africa, address LIS topics, and explore areas within scholarly communication and social justice.

Studies that did not meet these criteria were excluded. Hence, research unrelated to Africa was omitted, as the study examines LIS within the African context. Non-LIS studies were also excluded to maintain field relevance. Furthermore, studies lacking a clear focus on social justice in scholarly communication were not considered. Finally, non-English publications were excluded due to the researcher's limited expertise in other languages, which could affect accurate analysis. This approach ensured a well-defined dataset, enhancing the study's reliability and relevance.

Stage 4: Charting and collating the data

The process of data charting and collating involved three (3) phases to ensure the selection of relevant papers for analysis. These phases included (1) title screening, (2) abstract screening, and (3) full-text screening. The phases involved in this process are summarized and illustrated in Figure 2.
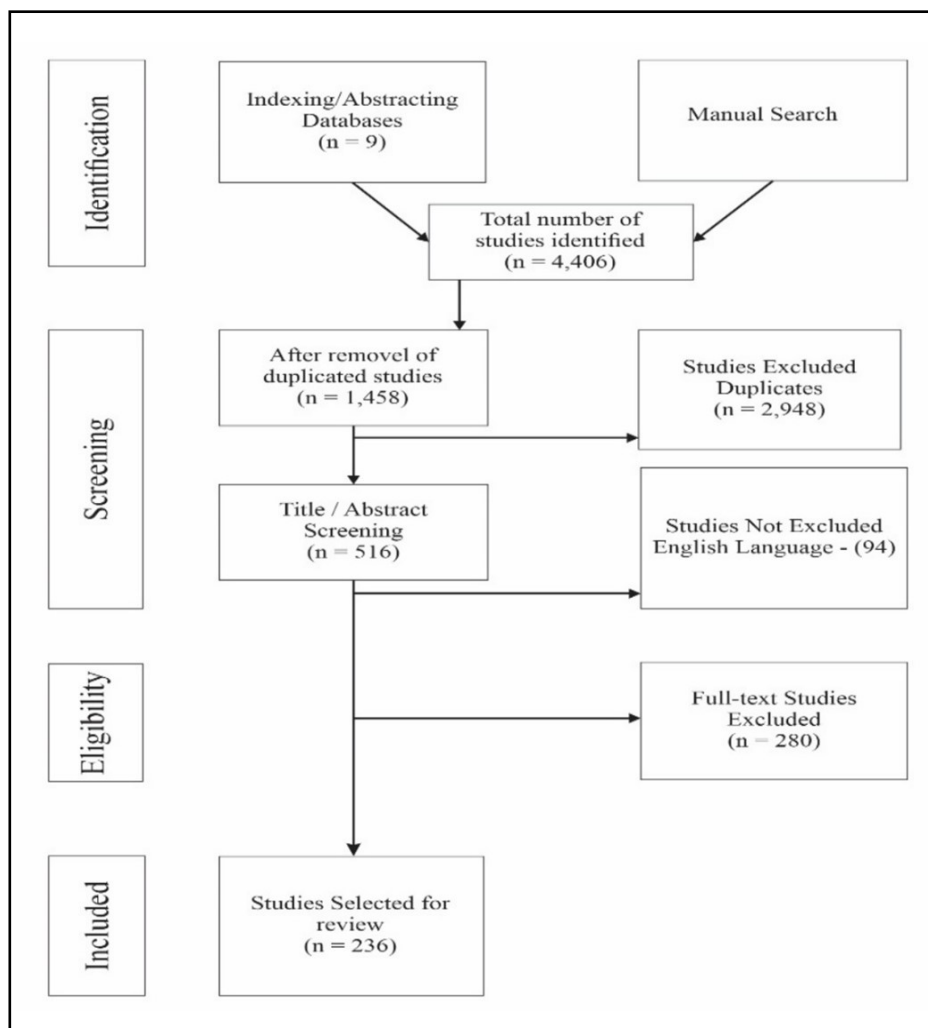

Figure 2: Summary of Search Collation Flowchart

Stage 4.1 Title screening

After applying the selection criteria, the next phase involved title screening. A total of 4,406 papers were retrieved from nine databases. Each title was reviewed for relevance to Library and Information Science (LIS), scholarly communication, and social justice in Africa. Articles that did not meet these criteria or were duplicates were excluded. After this screening, 2,948 articles were removed, leaving 1,458 articles for further assessment. This process ensured a focused and relevant dataset for the study's analysis.

Stage 4.2 Abstract screening

After title screening, abstracts of 1,458 papers were reviewed to assess their relevance. Studies not meeting the inclusion criteria were excluded. After this process, 516 papers qualified for the next evaluation phase, as shown in Figure 2.

Stage 4.3 Full-text screening

Finally, at the charting and collation of data stage, a full-text screening was conducted to ensure that only studies fully associated with the research objectives were included in the final analysis. The 516 selected papers were thoroughly reviewed for relevance. After this stage, 236 papers met all inclusion criteria and provided substantial discussions on scholarly communication and social justice, as shown in Figure 2.

Stage 5: Summarizing and reporting the results

At this stage, each of the 236 included articles was reread to extract key factors relative to the study objectives. Identified elements included the state of scholarly communication, LIS professionals' roles, challenges faced, and success stories. However, prior to the actual analysis, the researcher mapped the 236 selected papers to identify the top ten African countries contributing the most research. This step clarified the geographical distribution of scholarly contributions. The leading countries were South Africa (n=31), Egypt (n=22), Nigeria (n=21), Kenya (n=17), Ghana (n=15), Ethiopia (n=14), Uganda (n=13), Senegal (n=12), Rwanda (n=11), and Botswana (n=9), see Appendix 1. It is important to note, however, that some of the studies were collaborative efforts involving researchers from multiple countries. In such cases, credit was attributed to the country of the lead author.

Stage 5.1 Reporting the results

Figure 3 presents a comprehensive summary of the results derived from the 236 research papers examined in relation to the study objectives.
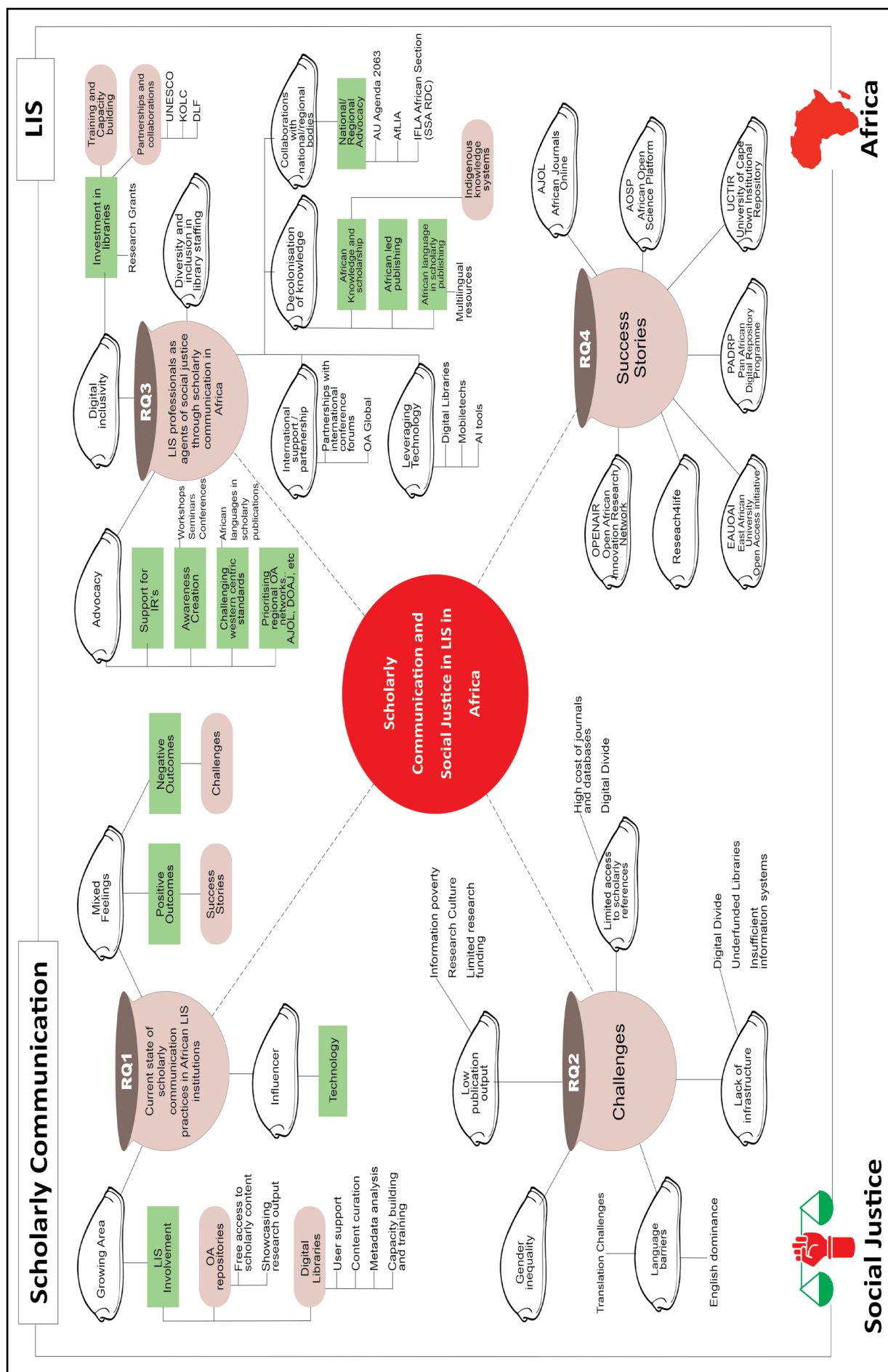
Scholarly Communication

LIS

Africa

Social Justice

Scholarly Communication and Social Justice in LIS in Africa

RQ1 — Current state of scholarly communication practices in African LIS institutions
- Growing Area
- LIS Involvement
- OA repositories
  - Free access to scholarly content
  - Showcasing research output
- Digital Libraries
  - User support
  - Content curation
  - Metadata analysis
  - Capacity building and training
- Influencer
  - Technology
- Mixed Feelings
  - Negative Outcomes
    - Challenges
  - Positive Outcomes
    - Success Stories

RQ2 — Challenges
- Low publication output
  - Information poverty
  - Research Culture
  - Limited research funding
  - High cost of journals and databases
  - Digital Divide
- Limited access to scholarly references
  - Digital Divide
  - Underfunded Libraries
  - Insufficient information systems
- Lack of infrastructure
- Gender inequality
- Translation Challenges
- Language barriers
  - English dominance

RQ3 — LIS professionals as agents of social justice through scholarly communication in Africa
- Investment in libraries
  - Research Grants
- Training and Capacity building
- Partnerships and collaborations
  - UNESCO
  - KOLC
  - DLF
- Diversity and inclusion in library staffing
- Digital inclusivity
- Advocacy
  - Support for IR's
  - Awareness Creation
  - Challenging western centric standards
  - Prioritising regional OA networks, AJOL, DOAJ, etc
  - Workshops
  - Seminars
  - Conferences
  - African languages in scholarly publications
- Collaborations with national/regional bodies
  - National/Regional Advocacy
  - AU Agenda 2063
  - AfLIA
  - IFLA African Section (SSA RDC)
- Decolonisation of knowledge
  - African Knowledge and scholarship
  - African led publishing
  - African language in scholarly publishing
  - Multilingual resources
  - Indigenous knowledge systems
- International support / partenership
  - Partnerships with international conference forums
  - OA Global
- Leveraging Technology
  - Digital Libraries
  - Mobiletechs
  - AI tools

RQ4 — Success Stories
- AJOL African Journals Online
- AOSP African Open Science Platform
- UCTIR University of Cape Town Institutional Repository
- PADRP Pan African Digital Repository Programme
- EAUOAI East African University Open Access initiative
- Research4life
- OPENAIR Open African Innovation Research Network

Figure 3: Results summary of dataset analysis

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RQ1. Current state of scholarly communication practices in Africa

The study's first objective, illustrated in Figure 3, examines the current state of scholarly communication in Africa. A review of the literature identified three key themes highlighting the vital role of Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals in shaping this landscape. LIS professionals significantly contribute to knowledge dissemination, research access, and scholarly visibility (Allen & Taylor, 2017; Ocran & Afful-Arthur, 2022). Their efforts bridge gaps between researchers, institutions, and academic communities (Winberry & Bishop, 2021; Tshabalala & Dube, 2024). Establishing digital libraries has been a crucial contribution, enhancing access, metadata analysis, and digital literacy (Zirra et al., 2019). The literature further emphasizes the establishment of open-access repositories by LIS professionals as a crucial step in enhancing scholarly communication in Africa. These repositories increase access to research outputs and amplify African scholars' intellectual contributions (Nwokedi & Nwokedi, 2018; Van Wyk & Mostert, 2011). However, LIS professionals express concerns regarding the sustainability of scholarly communication initiatives (Ocholla, 2011; Oguche, 2018). Key challenges include inadequate funding, concerns over the quality control of open-access publications, and the need for stronger support structures (Yusuf et al., 2019; Malapela, 2017). These issues are further examined in the next research objective.

RQ2. Challenges faced by LIS professionals in promoting scholarly communication and social justice in Africa

As illustrated in Figure 3, LIS professionals in Africa play a vital role in promoting scholarly communication and social justice. However, systemic challenges hinder their impact, including information poverty, inadequate research culture, gender inequality, language barriers, poor infrastructure, and restricted access to scholarly information due to high journal and database costs (Ocholla, 2011; 2024). According to the literature, one of the biggest challenges LIS professionals in Africa face in promoting scholarly communication is low publication output, largely due to information poverty, an underdeveloped research culture, and insufficient research funding (Bouaamri et al., 2022). Many lack access to essential academic resources, including journals, databases, and repositories, limiting their ability to conduct research and publish findings. Additionally, the African research culture does not emphasize frequent academic writing and publishing as strongly as in regions like Europe and North America (Mia, 2020). Many LIS professionals prioritize teaching and administrative duties over research, as institutions often provide little incentive or reward for scholarly engagement (Malapela, 2017; Gray, 2010). Furthermore, limited research funding in African institutions restricts data collection, conference participation, and extensive research projects, discouraging publication efforts (Uwizeye et al., 2022).

Gender inequality also presents a significant barrier to LIS professionals' contributions to scholarly communication (Kosmicki, 2019; Bladek, 2019). Women in LIS frequently face discrimination, hindering their career advancement and research participation. Crilly (2024) highlights that female LIS professionals often struggle with unequal access to research grants, underrepresentation in leadership, and societal pressures balancing professional and domestic responsibilities, reducing their engagement in research and academic publishing (Akhtar & Soroya, 2021). Besides that, language remains a significant barrier for LIS professionals in Africa, largely due to the dominance of English in academic publishing (Onyancha, 2007; Aldirdiri, 2024). Many African scholars conduct research in local languages, yet high-impact journals and major academic databases primarily publish in English. As Heleta and Mzileni (2024) argue, this creates disadvantages for non-English-speaking researchers, who must either invest in costly translation services or risk their work being unpublished. Consequently, valuable indigenous knowledge is often excluded from global academic discourse (Köbli et al., 2024). Even African scholars who publish in English may struggle with language proficiency, affecting the clarity and acceptance of their work (Dadze-Arthur & Mangai, 2024). Additionally, inadequate infrastructure further hinders LIS professionals' ability to promote scholarly communication. Many African institutions face poor digital infrastructure, underfunded libraries, and outdated information systems (Awazi & Balgah, 2024). The digital divide exacerbates these challenges, as unreliable internet connectivity and limited digital repositories restrict access to scholarly resources (Mensah, 2024). Finally, limited access to scholarly information due to the high cost of journals and academic databases remains a major challenge, as highlighted in many reviewed papers. North et al. (2020) note that African universities and research institutions struggle to afford expensive journal subscriptions, restricting access to essential content. Strydom et al. (2022) argue that this financial barrier creates an uneven playing field, limiting African scholars' contributions to academic discourse.

RQ3. LIS professionals as agents of social justice through scholarly communication in Africa

The third research objective examined the role of LIS professionals in Africa in advancing social justice through scholarly communication. It explored their efforts in promoting equitable access to knowledge, addressing systemic barriers in academic publishing, and fostering inclusivity. The literature suggests that LIS professionals serve as key agents of social justice by engaging in advocacy, digital inclusivity, international collaborations, and the decolonization of knowledge. Their contributions extend beyond traditional library services to leveraging technology for bridging information gaps, enhancing accessibility, and ensuring marginalized voices are represented in scholarly discourse, ultimately fostering a more just and inclusive academic environment.

LIS professionals play a crucial role in advancing social justice through advocacy, particularly in promoting Institutional Repositories (IRs). Bouaamri et al. (2022) highlight that IRs serve as open-access platforms that preserve and disseminate African research, addressing barriers caused by expensive academic journals (Laugu, 2024). Ajani et al. (2024) emphasize that LIS professionals champion IRs to democratize knowledge access. Crilly (2024) argues that LIS professionals can mitigate these biases by advocating for inclusive publication criteria that recognize indigenous knowledge systems. Malapela (2017) further underscores the importance of regional open-access networks to enhance African scholarship visibility. Initiatives like the African Open Science Platform and the African Digital Library Support Network (Kimengsi et al., 2016) demonstrate these efforts, ensuring African researchers retain control over their intellectual output.

Further, LIS professionals promote social justice through digital inclusivity (Crilly, 2024). However, African institutions face digital divides due to inadequate infrastructure (Ajani et al., 2024). Gor (2017) highlights that LIS professionals advocate for increased investment in libraries, focusing on both resources and capacity-building. In Kenya, the University of Nairobi Library has implemented digital literacy training programs, teaching students to navigate electronic databases, conduct online research, and critically evaluate digital sources (Otike & Barat, 2021), enhancing equitable access to information. Additionally, as presented in Figure 3, LIS professionals strengthen their role in promoting social justice through international partnerships and support. Siyao et al. (2017) and Racelis (2018) highlight how engagement with global organizations and conferences bridges African researchers and the global academic community. Regionally, partnerships with organizations like AfLIA and IFLA SSA RDC amplify Africa's voice in scholarly discussions (Ossai-Ugbah, 2013; Eberhart, 2015). Additionally, the African Union's Agenda 2063 promotes knowledge production and dissemination as key to sustainable development.

Decolonizing knowledge is also central to LIS professionals' efforts. Historically, African scholarship has been marginalized (Birdi, 2021), often required to conform to Western standards (Mama, 2007). LIS professionals challenge this by advocating for African-led publishing initiatives (Ibrahim et al., 2024). African Journals Online (AJOL) exemplifies this, providing African scholars with spaces where their work is valued (Mwambari et al., 2022). Furthermore, LIS professionals support African-language scholarly publishing, advocating for multilingual resources (Lor, 2012). The University of Cape Town, for instance, incorporates indigenous languages into academic publishing to enhance linguistic inclusivity (Scott, 2023; Botes, 2021). Lastly, technology also plays a crucial role in advancing social justice. Digital libraries increase access to research materials (Omekwu et al., 2023), while initiatives like the Digital Library of Africa and PALIS have provided open access for two decades (Clarke, 2004).

Mobile technology has further expanded access, especially in areas with limited infrastructure (Dony et al., 2024).

RQ4. Successful initiatives in advancing scholarly communication and social justice in Africa

As presented in Figure 3, the scoping review indicates that, over the past two decades, a number of initiatives have been implemented across Africa to promote scholarly communication and social justice within the Library and Information Science (LIS) field. These efforts have sought to address challenges such as restricted access to research materials, Western-dominated publishing standards, and the digital divide that has historically marginalized African researchers. Despite these challenges, significant progress has been made through open-access platforms, digital repositories, and knowledge-sharing initiatives. Some of the most impactful programs identified in the literature include African Journals Online (AJOL), the African Open Science Platform (AOSP), the University of Cape Town Institutional Repository (UCTIR), Research4Life, the East African University Open Access Initiative (EAUOAI), and the Pan-African Digital Repository Programme (PADRP). According to the literature, one of the most influential initiatives in scholarly communication and social justice in Africa is African Journals Online (AJOL) (Siyao et al., 2017). Established in 1998, AJOL provides a digital platform for African-published scholarly journals, ensuring wider dissemination of research output (AJOL, n.d). Before AJOL, many African scholars struggled to publish and access research due to a lack of locally available journals and the dominance of Western publishers (Murray & Clobridge, 2014). By hosting thousands of articles across multiple disciplines, AJOL has successfully bridged this gap, offering an open-access platform that allows scholars from underprivileged institutions to engage in academic discourse without financial barriers (Adegbilero-Iwari et al., 2023).

Another major initiative is the African Open Science Platform (AOSP), which promotes open science principles, data-sharing practices, and national research infrastructures (Motshegwa, 2023). It fosters transparency and collaboration, ensuring African research data is accessible to scholars, policymakers, and the public. AOSP has played a key role in advocating for policies that encourage open-access mandates in African institutions, thus reducing knowledge inequalities (Jain, 2021). The University of Cape Town Institutional Repository (UCTIR) is another success story in institutional open access. It provides a freely accessible platform for research output from the University of Cape Town (OpenUCT, n.d). The UCTIR reduces reliance on expensive academic journals, ensuring research findings reach a global audience. This contributes to the decolonization of knowledge by allowing African scholars to control how their research is disseminated (Maake-Malatji & Cox, 2024).

Furthermore, the Research4Life initiative has also transformed access to scholarly information in Africa. It provides free or low-cost access to peer-reviewed journals and databases for researchers in developing countries (Research4Life, n.d). By partnering with major academic publishers, Research4Life ensures that African scholars can access high-quality scientific literature, which would otherwise be unaffordable (Hill, 2021). The program has significantly enriched research standards in African universities, enabling scholars to participate actively in global academic discussions (Zulu & Twum-Darko, 2023). Finally, at the regional level, the East African University Open Access Initiative (EAUOAI) has been instrumental in promoting open-access policies in higher education institutions. This initiative unites universities across Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Ethiopia to develop institutional open-access policies (Muneja & Ndenje-Sichalwe, 2016). According to Arinze (2024), EAUOAI fosters cross-border collaboration, enabling researchers to share knowledge more effectively.

Strengthening scholarly communication and social justice in Africa: Key recommendations from the literature

The literature on scholarly communication and social justice in Library and Information Science (LIS) in Africa presents several recommendations aimed at addressing challenges and fostering a more inclusive and equitable academic environment. These recommendations focus on policy development, capacity building, infrastructure investment, regional collaboration, and the integration of indigenous knowledge systems to create a scholarly communication ecosystem that reflects African realities and priorities.

A major recommendation is the integration of social justice principles into scholarly communication policies at institutional, national, and regional levels (Adebayo, 2024). Policies should ensure equitable access to publishing opportunities regardless of gender, language, economic status, or institutional affiliation (Ramaila, 2024). Kasprowicz et al. (2023) emphasize that universities and research institutions should mandate open-access publishing while providing financial support for underrepresented scholars. Additionally, Rasekoala (2022) and Esseh (2011) call for policy frameworks that promote the inclusion of African knowledge systems in academic discourse. Advocacy efforts should prioritize African-led journals (Ochieng & Gyasi, 2021) and research that aligns with Africa's development agenda to ensure scholarly communication contributes to societal progress (Tikly & Barrett, 2011).

Another recommendation is for LIS education and training programs to be updated to reflect the evolving scholarly communication landscape. Gibson et al. (2017) suggest incorporating courses on open-access publishing, copyright laws, digital literacy, and social justice in knowledge dissemination.

Mpuangnan and Ntombela (2024) emphasize equipping future LIS professionals with skills to navigate scholarly communication challenges, through hands-on training in institutional repository management, digital archiving, and open science practices. Strengthening LIS curricula ensures graduates become strong advocates for open-access initiatives within their institutions. The need for ongoing training and professional development programs were also identified as a key recommendation for strengthening scholarly communication in Africa. For instance, Okello-Obura and Kigongo-Bukenya (2011) recommend workshops, conferences, and online training to enhance LIS professionals' expertise in open-access publishing. Ocholla and Bothma (2007) highlight the importance of professional development in research data management and digital preservation. Hepworth and Duvigneau (2012) further suggest tailored training programs for LIS professionals in under-resourced institutions to bridge knowledge gaps.

Furthermore, the need for a collaborative approach involving governments, universities, funding agencies, librarians, and researchers was also identified as crucial in addressing barriers such as high journal costs, digital literacy gaps, and inadequate research funding (Jain, 2021). Policymakers and funding bodies should engage in discussions on scholarly communication to create a sustainable open-access environment (Kakai et al., 2018). Additionally, Nwokedi & Nwokedi (2018) advocate for private sector and philanthropic involvement in funding digital libraries and research initiatives to support LIS professionals. Local communities should actively participate in research processes to ensure their knowledge and lived experiences contribute to scholarly outputs (Jaeger et al., 2011). Trotter et al. (2014) propose participatory research models, citizen science initiatives, and oral history projects to bridge the gap between academic and grassroots knowledge-sharing. Mackenzie et al. (2015) argue that stronger ties between academia and local communities enhance social justice and inclusivity.

Finally, promoting open access and integrating indigenous knowledge systems came up as very essential for fostering equitable scholarly communication in Africa (Adakawa, 2022). Historically, African scholarship has been marginalized due to the dominance of Western publishing standards, limiting the visibility of indigenous knowledge and local research methodologies (Raju et al., 2015). To address this, academic publishing must embrace African languages, oral traditions, and region-specific research approaches. Increasing support for African-led publishing initiatives will empower scholars to disseminate knowledge on their own terms, reducing reliance on Western-dominated platforms (Ibrahim et al., 2024). Additionally, multilingual research dissemination will enhance accessibility, ensuring that scholarly outputs reach diverse audiences, including local communities, policymakers, and global researchers (Chowdhury et al., 2023).

Establishing open-access policies that prioritize indigenous knowledge and culturally relevant research will help decolonize academia while fostering a more inclusive knowledge-sharing environment (Crilly, 2024).

Conclusion

The scoping review of scholarly communication and social justice in Library and Information Science (LIS) in Africa (2004–2024) reveals significant progress alongside persistent challenges. Over the past two decades, LIS professionals, academic institutions, and research communities have increasingly recognized the role of scholarly communication in promoting equitable access to knowledge. Open-access initiatives, digital repositories, and regional collaborations have improved research visibility and inclusivity. However, systemic barriers such as inadequate funding, digital divides, and language constraints continue to hinder progress. A key finding from the review is the growing focus on social justice, particularly in addressing the needs of underrepresented communities. African libraries, archives, and information centers have become essential agents of social transformation, bridging literacy gaps, preserving indigenous knowledge, and challenging systemic biases in information organization. Open-access publishing and advocacy for inclusive information policies have reshaped Africa's scholarly communication landscape. Despite these advancements, challenges such as limited government support, censorship, and linguistic barriers persist, restricting widespread knowledge accessibility. LIS professionals play a critical role in advancing social justice by supporting Open Access initiatives, fostering diverse research collaborations, and advocating for inclusive policies. Moving forward, investments in open-access infrastructure, digital literacy, and African-led publishing efforts are crucial to ensuring broader knowledge equity.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix 1: Geographical distribution of scholarly contributions N=236

Countries	Number of Publications
South Africa	31
Egypt	22
Nigeria	21
Kenya	17
Ghana	15
Ethiopia	14
Uganda	13
Senegal	12
Rwanda	11
Botswana	9
Zimbabwe	7
Tanzania	6
Botswana	6
Morocco	4
Mali	3
Sudan	3
Algeria	3
South Sudan	3
Guinea	2
Tunisia	2
Republic of the Congo	2
Somalia	2
Libya	2
Niger	2
Central African Republic	2
Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire)	2
Angola	2
Mozambique	2
Democratic Republic of the Congo	2
Chad	2
Cameroon	2
Eritrea	2
Guinea-Bissau	1
Gabon	1
Liberia	1

Countries	Number of Publications
Sierra Leone	1
Namibia	1
Mauritius	1
Mauritania	1
Equatorial Guinea	1
Cabo Verde	1
Seychelles	1
Burkina Faso	1
Gambia	-
Benin	-
Comoros	-
São Tomé and Príncipe	-
Malawi	-
Lesotho	-
Burundi	-
Djibouti	-
Togo	-
Madagascar	-
Eswatini (Swaziland)	-

Source: Scoping review case set for analysis