Trends and Challenges of Academic Publishing in Ethiopian Public Universities

Berhanu Abera*

Abstract: *Though it is said that research and publication have been given attention in Ethiopian academic institutions, disseminating research outputs using scholarly publications has become challenging. From experience, by virtue of the researcher's position as an editor, he has heard challenges of academic publishing from authors, reviewers and academics. This study assessed the trends and challenges of academic publishing in Ethiopian public universities. The study was delimited to five geographically scattered public universities and to arrive at the intended purpose, questionnaire, researcher's diary (reflective journal), interview and documents (research manuals, publication guidelines and publication offices action plans) were employed. The study revealed that academic publishing has almost been taken as subsidiary activity in the sample public universities. The universities engaged their academics more in the teaching-learning than in research and publication. Many of the academics involved in academic publishing did so to get promoted. The editorial practices of the sampled universities were also found to be too lengthy. Moreover, proper feedback communications were not held among editors, authors and assessors. The study, further, identified that the reputability of journals was determined by the universities where the journals were housed; no external body accredited them. Finally, based on the results, conclusions were drawn and recommendations were suggested.*

Key words: *academic publishing, article, higher education, manuscript, and research*

* Assistant Professor, Institute of Educational Research, Addis Ababa University; email: wantanber@yahoo.com, berhanu.abera6@aau.edu.et; P.O. Box 150535, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Introduction

The historic perspective of academic publishing tells us that the first scientific magazine, *Journal des Sçavans,* was published in 1665; more than 350 years ago. A year later, it was followed by a second journal, *Philosophical Transactions* (Savenije and Smith, 2003). As these scholars further state, a major factor in the start of those scientific journals was the rising number of researchers.

Writing and publishing scientific articles is an important activity of academic life. It is a vital and integral part of academics (Gilmore *et al*. 2006, cited in Ligthelm and Koekemoer, 2009). Most importantly, academic publishing is the primary vehicle for the advancement of scientific knowledge (Ligthelm and Koekemoer, 2009). Furthermore, scientific publication can serve as documentation of work performed, fostering of exchange (feedback, discussion and debate) and sustainment of support and competitive funding (Lüttge, 2011). Scholarly articles are also decisive to indicate societal problems and to fill those gaps. Besides, they can serve as a form of promotion in the academic world. "Publications are imperative for career advancement and for the economic survival of research departments," (Peat, 2002, p. 2). In line with this, Körner (2008) points out that researcher in the academic world are inevitably judged by the number and quality of their published papers; they are rarely judged by their dexterity in the laboratory, their teaching skills, or their erudition. Moreover, even the most extraordinary experimental results are of little benefit if they fail to reach the appropriate audience. Specially, in tertiary institutions, academics are encouraged to publish scholarly articles; they must publish or perish.

Nowadays, academic publishing has become familiar in the Ethiopian context. Both public and private higher institutes organize conferences and publish conference proceedings. What is more, these institutes launched interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary journals. Some of the journals are peer-reviewed though few of them are reputable. It is

believed that these publications have served as disseminating research outputs and sharing knowledge to the scientific community and practitioners both at home and abroad. They have also been used for teaching and reference materials and in general contribute to the development of the country. Above all, a lot of academics have got promotions in their academic rank and profile as a result of the issuance of their articles in these publications.

As Savenije and Smith (2003) claim, though the number of scientific papers has grown these days, the existing publishing system is troubled by considerable problems. One of the main problems is that the system is sluggish: it takes at least six months, sometimes up to a year and a half, before a submitted paper actually appears in print. In addition to this, the system is becoming unaffordable because of vast price increases. In line with this, Casper (2012) in his own blog states that the system of academic publishing is stupid. Elisabeth (2012) also sees the peer-review system as a bottleneck of academic publishing in the Ethiopian context.

This study examined the trends and challenges of academic publishing in Ethiopian public universities; that is, it assessed the discrepancy between the expected and the actual practice of academic publishing.

It is expected that this study can give highlights about major incongruities of academic publishing in Ethiopian public universities. It can provide base line data concerning academic publications in the study areas. By doing so, it is believed that the results of this study would help researchers, publishers, research and publication officers, reviewers, editors and practitioners to identify the root problems of academic publishing and inform them how it can be carried out effectively and efficiently. The investigation will also increase awareness among instructors and graduate students in publishing and disseminating their research outlets. Moreover, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education may identify areas that need attention in relation to academic publishing. Other researchers may also undertake other

studies in this area based on the findings of this study or they may further investigate in the area of the subject.

Statement of the Problem

Most academic journal publishers carry out double-blind peer-review by professionals in the area in which the journal is issued. Most of the publishers also conduct preliminary assessment of submitted manuscripts following receipt. To save time for authors and peer-reviewers, only those papers that seem most likely to meet the editorial criteria are sent for formal review. Those manuscripts judged by the editors to be of insufficient general interest as per the preliminary assessment criteria are rejected promptly without external review. That is to mean that manuscripts judged to be of potential interest to the editors' readership are usually sent for formal review, typically to two reviewers; otherwise, it is sent back to the author(s). If articles are accepted for publication, editors copy-edit them and send the issue to the designated publisher and/or publish on their webpage. Or else, manuscripts submitted for possible publication may be rejected for numerous reasons. In most cases, the reasons for rejecting manuscripts have been found to be closely linked with the authors' ways of reporting their research outputs (Byrne, 1998; Bordage, 2001; Ajao, 2005).

Recent local studies depict that research and publication in the Ethiopian context have been steadily declining (e.g., Ayalew, *et al*. 2009; Tesfaye, 2007). That is, research and development have been given marginal attention in the Ethiopian academic institutions (e.g., Habtamu, 2000; Tesfaye, 2007; Ayalew, *et al*. 2009). Disseminating research outputs using scholarly publications has become challenging. Many academics seem to be a little easily offended when it comes to publishing their results. That is, from experience, by virtue of the researcher's position as editor, he has heard different complaints about academic publishing in Ethiopia from authors, reviewers and academics. Peer-reviewers rejected many of the manuscripts

submitted for publications and informed the editorial body that the quality of manuscripts has deteriorated. Authors, on the other hand, complained that their manuscripts were rejected unfairly and mentioned that their rejected manuscripts have got a chance to be published overseas (outside the country). This has become the critical problem facing academic publishing in the country. To fill this disparity, the need for research to look into the trends and challenges of academic publishing in Ethiopian public universities is, therefore, important as no research has so far been done in this line. In doing so, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- What is status of academic publishing in the Ethiopian public universities like?
- How is the publication process undertaken?
- What are the shortcomings of academic publishing in the Ethiopian public universities?
- How is reputability of journals determined?

Objectives

The main objective of the study was to examine the trends and challenges of academic publication in the Ethiopian public universities.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The intention of this study was to collect data specific to the trends and challenges of academic publishing in the Ethiopian public universities. To achieve the objectives and answer the basic research questions of the study, a descriptive survey research design was employed.

Research Setting and Participants

The universities where this study was conducted are situated in different parts of Ethiopia. Five public universities in the country, namely, Addis Ababa, Bahir Dar, Hawassa, Jimma and Mekelle universities were chosen on the bases of stratified random sampling technique. The population of the study was stratified into five geographically scattered 'old'/first generation public universities. The study excluded second and third generation (newly opened) public universities for the fact that they were less experienced in academic publishing. Moreover, even though there were lots of issues pertinent to academic publishing, the focus of this study was limited to the expected and the actual practice of academic publishing.

The target participants for the study were academic and research staff members in those universities. The study also involved research and publication officers, and editors of scholarly publications. *Academic staff members* refers to those who were employed in the capacity of teaching and/or research while *research staff members* refers to those who were serving as research staff were recognized by the universities' senate legislations. *Research and publication officers* refer to those officials who were serving as facilitators of research undertakings and the publication of reports thereof. *Editors* include members of editorial boards, such as editors-in-chief, associate editors and copy-editors.

The study involved randomly selected 550 academic/research staff members familiar with academic publishing, and 50 editors. It also included 5 research and publication officers (1 from each university). All in all, the study used 555 informants.

Instruments of Data Collection

To gather data for the study, four different instruments were employed. These were questionnaire, researcher's diary (reflective journal), interview and documents (research manuals, publication guidelines and action plans of publication offices). That is, the necessary data for the study were obtained by distributing a questionnaire to academic and research staff members, and editors, by keeping notes, by interviewing research and publication officers and editors-in-chief, and by assessing research manuals, publication guidelines and action plans of publication offices. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed and collected at the study site by field assistants in person. After explaining the objectives of the study and securing the interviewees' consent, the researcher himself conducted the interviews. Besides, he collected documents and kept diaries.

The purpose of the questionnaires was to gather the responses of these subjects regarding academic publishing at their college/faculty in particular and in their university in general. The questionnaire also sought to elicit respondents' opinions about teaching/advisory responsibilities and publication activities. Both parts of the questionnaire were prepared in English language assuming that the respondents were proficient in English. After identifying the instructors/researchers who were familiar with academic publishing, research assistants distributed the questionnaire to 550 respondents in the 5 universities (150 in Addis Ababa, 100 in Bahir Dar, 100 in Hawassa, 100 in Jimma and 100 in Mekele). They also distributed the questionnaire to 50 journal editors (10 in each sample university). From 550 copies distributed to instructors/researchers, 50 were not returned, and 29 were discarded since they were not properly filled in. What is more, of the 50 copies distributed to editors, 10 were not returned. Therefore, data from 471 instructors/researchers (85.64% response rate) and 40 editors (80 response rate) were analyzed in the study.

In order to validate the data gathered though the questionnaire, the researcher made separate interviews with 10 chief editorial staff members and 5 research and publication officers. Moreover, documents were collected and field notes were recorded to counter check the results of questionnaire and interview.

Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were carried out in the study. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were employed to analyze the data. Finally, the results were interpreted and discussed in relation to the research questions and relevant literature. That is, in order to interpret data obtained through the questionnaire, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviations) were applied, and to make the interpretations more dependable, a one-sample t-test was also employed by taking 3 (neutral) as a test value using SPSS version 20. The responses collected using a five-point Likert scale with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest were also analyzed. Mean scores were then computed based on those rating scales. Thus, the mean score of any individual item was supposed to fall between 1 and 5. Consequently, the means were interpreted against a neutral point of 3 since it stands at the middle in the rating scale. Therefore, following Best and Kahan (1995), mean scores above 3 were taken as favorable opinions to the given point of view while those below 3 were considered as unfavorable. Moreover, the data obtained through some of the items were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. On the other hand, the data gathered by means of interviews, documents, reflective journals and open-ended items were analyzed qualitatively.

Furthermore, data analysis and discussions were made by correlating, consolidating and computing quantitative and qualitative data. That is, quantitative data were presented in tables, bar graphs and charts, and interpretations were made by correlating quantitative data with qualitative data and by combining both kinds of data to create new or

consolidated variables. Then, discussions were made by comparing and contrasting the data obtained by means of all the tools and narrating theoretical issues from literature review. Finally, based on the findings of the study and discussions, conclusions were drawn and recommendations forwarded.

Ethical Clearance

There are two types of ethical issues that were considered for this research – formal and informal or unwritten ethical issues. The participants were provided with written consent (informed consent) in the introduction part of the questionnaire and given the opportunity to determine their confidentiality or anonymity. Informal ethical issues were those that emerged in the field. The researcher was considerate and respectful of informants' requests; informants were told that they would remain anonymous throughout the study. They were also requested for their permission before the interviews were held and recorded. That is, all things were done based on the willingness of the research participants.

Validity and Reliability

The emphasis given to defining conceptual issues and the review of related literature gave a thorough background to the study. This review was believed to enable the researcher to focus on issues with proven evidence and construct the questionnaire and interview guides for investigating the trends and challenges of academic publication in Ethiopian public universities. The extensive review of related literature also formed a firm foundation to provide an adequate representation of various aspects of the study.

To confirm the validity of the instruments, their drafts were presented to researchers, research and publication officers and editors for comments. What is more, triangulation in this study was intended as one way of securing validly; the use of a variety of sources of data to

see consistency. To obtain the reliability of these instruments, a pilot study was conducted on one college of Addis Ababa University (College of Business and Economics), that was to estimate the internal consistency of the questionnaire. In so doing, Cronbach Alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of responses from one item to another. And most of the items were retained because their reliability results were calculated to be between Cronbach Alpha .70 and .85. Items below .60 were modified and few of them were discarded since they were low in standard.

Procedure of the Study

The investigation was carried out in three phases. The first phase was a preparatory stage where an extensive review of literature was made on the nature and trend of academic publishing, publishing scientific articles, editorial practices of local and international journals, challenges in publishing scholarly articles and the like. This initial phase built an essential basis for the subsequent task as it provided an overview of the different aspects of the research topic and the accumulated wealth of knowledge in the research theme.

In the second phase, sample universities were selected and contact was established with the universities in order to obtain their support. Furthermore, research manuals and publication guidelines were collected and studied. Discussions with research and publication officers and chief editorial members were made for further understanding.

In the third phase of the study, a plenty of time was spent on gathering pertinent data. The data were finally synthesized, analyzed and organized.

Results of the Study

This section is devoted to the presentation and analysis of results of the study based on the research questions. The section is divided into five sub-sections. The first sub-section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The second sub-section describes the findings related to the state of academic publication in the selected universities, such as instructors/researchers publication activities, and roles of editors and publication officers. The publication processes involved in by the universities are dealt with in the third sub-section. Results related to challenges of academic publishing in the Ethiopian public universities are presented the fourth section, and the last sub-section presented evaluation of reputability of journals.

It should be noted here that the presentation and analysis of quantitative data are followed by those of the qualitative data (The data obtained though questionnaires are presented and analyzed first and followed by data obtained through other instruments).

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Instructors/researches and editors of scholarly publications in the five sampled public universities were requested to fill in a questionnaire. Items in the questionnaire were similar in structure and content, but some items were reworded and added to consider issues related to the respondents. They basically covered background of the respondents, publication activities of the respondents, editorial processes, and challenges of academic publishing.

The first part of the questionnaire for instructor/researchers and editors sought information on their personal data such as sex, years involved in the academia/editorial activities, academic rank, editorial position, publication discipline and the like. Five hundred and fifty instructors/researchers and fifty editors were asked to fill in the questionnaire. From the distributed copies, 471 and 40 completed ones

were respectively collected. In analyzing and discussing the data, only valid responses were used and missing values were disregarded. For this reason, the total number of respondents might vary in the analysis. Table 1 below summarizes the respondents' background information.

Table 1: Respondents' background information

S/No	Instructors' /Researchers' Characteristics	n (%)	Editors' Characteristics	n (%)
1	Sex:		Sex:	
	Female	58(12.3)	Female	0(0)
	Male	413(87.7)	Male	40(100)
2	Year of experience:		Editorial Experience:	
	Less than 1 year	10(2.1)	Less than 1 year	2(5)
	1-5 years	128(27.2)	1-5 years	10(25)
	6-10 years	172(36.5)	6-10 years	14(35)
	11-15 years	86(18.3)	11-15 years	5(12.5)
	15-20 years	36(7.6)	16-20 years	3(7.5)
	Over 20 years	39(8.3)	> 20 years	6(15)
3	Academic rank:		Editorial participation:	
	Graduate Assistant	18(3.8)	as Editor-in-Chief	8(20)
	Lecturer	294(62.4)	as Editor (Deputy-Editor-in-Chief)	15(37.5)
	Assistant Professor	118(25.1)		
	Associate Professor	22(4.7)	as Managing Editor	6(15)
	Professor	10(2.1)	as Associate Editor	6(15)
	Others	9(1.9)	as Language Editor	3(7.5)
			others	2(5)
4	College/Institute/Faculty:		Publication discipline:	
	Social Sciences	122(25.9)	Social Sciences	8(20)
	Natural Sciences	96(20.4)	Natural Sciences	8(20)
	Language studies and humanities	18(3.8)	Language Studies and Humanities	1(2.5)
	Education	50(10.6)	Education	8(20)
	Law	16(3.4)	Law	2(5)
	Engineering	22(4.7)	Engineering	2(5)
	Medicine	36(7.6)	Medicine	6(15)
	Business and economics	24(5.1)	Business and Economics	
	Others	68(14.4)		3(7.5)
			Others	2(5)

As shown in the table above, 87.7% of the instructors/researchers were males while 12.3% were females. In terms of experience, 36.5% of them were involved in the academia for 6 to10 years while 27.2% were in it from 1 to 5 years. The remaining 18.7% were in the industry for 11

to 15 years. When it comes to academic rank, majority (62.4) were Lecturers whereas 25.1% were Assistant Professors. Associate Professors and Professors made 4.7% and 2.1% respectively.

What is more, 25.9% were from Social Sciences faculties while 20.4% were from Natural Sciences. The remaining served in other faculties like Language Studies and Humanities, Education, Law, Engineering, Medicine, Business and Economics and others.

All the editorial staff respondents were males and majority had more than one year of editorial experience (25% of them between 1 and 5 years, 35% of them between 6 and 10 years, and the rest of them above 10 years). From the total of editorial staff respondents, 37.5% of them served as editors while 20% of them served as editors-in-chief. Thirty percent of them worked as managing editors and associate editors. A few were also language editors. In terms of area of publication (publication discipline), Social Sciences, Natural Sciences and Education constituted 20% each and Law and Engineering covered 5% each. Medicine comprised 15% and Business and Economics 7.5%.

In addition to instructors/researchers and editors, the study involved research and publications officers. That is, officers who plan, organize, lead, manage and control the activities of all researches and publications at university level were interviewed to triangulate the data obtained through the questionnaire.

Status of Academic Publishing

During the study, an attempt was made to look into the teaching or supervisory responsibility of instructors/researchers. That is, sampled instructors/researchers were asked about the number of courses they then taught at undergraduate and graduate levels, the number of students they supervised/advised, and the extent to which they encouraged their advisees to publish the projects under their

supervision. As illustrated in Table 2 below, majority of the respondents offered two courses at an undergraduate level (29.9%) and only a few of them delivered postgraduate courses. Some 61.5% did not give courses at a Masters level while 92.1% did not offer any course at the Doctoral level. Most of the respondents also advised undergraduate students; they advised more than 20 students in three years. In fact, some of them (17.7%) supervised about 5 master's students during the previous three years. The respondents reported that they rarely encouraged their advisees to publish reports of the research they conducted under their supervision and majority of the students did not publish during their studies.

Table 2: Teaching/supervisory responsibilities of instructors/researchers

	Details	Results in %					
		N	None	1	2	3	4 or more
1.	Undergraduate courses currently taught	469	18.1	20.0	29.9	17.9	14.1
2.	Postgraduate courses currently taught at a Masters level	468	61.5	12.8	15.2	6.4	4.1
3.	Postgraduate courses currently taught at a Doctorate level	466	92.1	3.4	3.4	1.1	-
4.	Students supervised/advised during the past three years	**N**	None	1-5	6-10	16-20	21 or more
	4.1 First degree students	468	23.9	13.7	22.6	16.7	23.1
	4.2 Masters students	468	57.5	17.7	11.1	6.8	6.8
	4.3 PhD students	468	92.1	6.0	1.1	.2	.6
5.	Instructors' encouragement of their advisees to publish outputs of the research they conducted	**N**	I didn't advise	Always	Sometimes	Undecided	Rarely Never
	5.1 First degree students	443	39.7	9.0	11.5	3.6	16.7 19.4
	5.2 Masters students	381	52.8	2.1	1.8	1.8	13.9 27.6
	5.3 PhD students	345	88.7	1.2	.3	.3	2.0 7.5
6.	Students (Advisees) published articles during their studies	**N**	None	1-5	6-10	16-20	21 or more
	6.1 First degree students	437	82.2	13.3	2.7	1.4	.5
	6.2 Masters students	380	74.7	18.7	6.1	.5	-
	6.3 PhD students	380	74.7	18.7	6.1	.5	-

An effort has also been made to look into the publication involvement of instructors/researchers during the previous three years. The results are indicated in the figure below.
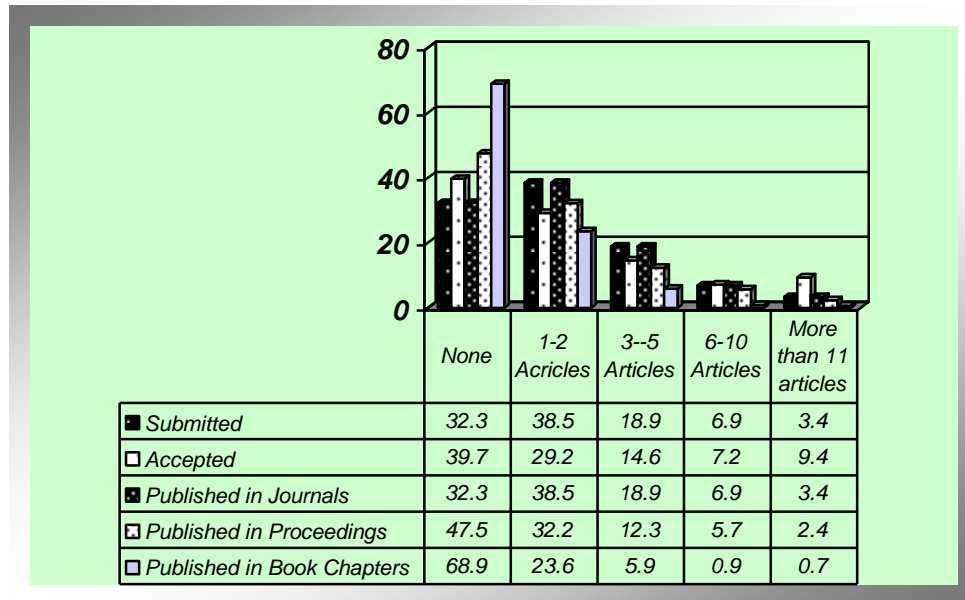

	None	1-2 Acricles	3--5 Articles	6-10 Articles	More than 11 articles
■ Submitted	32.3	38.5	18.9	6.9	3.4
▢ Accepted	39.7	29.2	14.6	7.2	9.4
▨ Published in Journals	32.3	38.5	18.9	6.9	3.4
▨ Published in Proceedings	47.5	32.2	12.3	5.7	2.4
▢ Published in Book Chapters	68.9	23.6	5.9	0.9	0.7

Figure 1: Research outputs that instructors/researchers submitted and published during the previous three years.

Note: Values are in percentages.

As shown in Figure 1 above, 38.5% of the respondents submitted 1-2 manuscripts for publication during the previous three years. Of these 29.2% reported that the manuscripts were accepted for publication. The vast majority of the respondents said that they published 1-2 articles in academic journals (38.5%), conference proceedings (32.2%) and book chapters (23.6%) during the previous three years. The results depicted that respondents mostly published their research outputs in academic journals.

Instructors/Researchers were also asked to mention the reasons for involving in academic publishing. Their responses showed that the primary reason was for better promotion opportunities. The second was for knowledge sharing. Self-development and interest were the third and fourth reasons respectively. The results obtained through the interview with research and publication officers seemed to support this. They pointed out that many academics no longer write papers for the sake of sharing knowledge; they published to get promoted.

Apart from the instructors'/researchers' involvement in the academic publishing, an attempt was made to look at the activities of instructors/researchers in submitting manuscript for publication. In the questionnaire, both editors and instructors/researchers were asked to rate the activities the instructors/researches were involved in for submitting a manuscript for publication. The following responses were obtained.

Table 3: Publication activities that authors are involved in

Item No	Details		Editors' responses				Authors' responses			
		N	Mean	SD	t*	N	Mean	SD	t*
1	Seeking advice from editorial staff members on how the Publication Office handles submitted manuscripts.	40	3.93	0.94	6.195*	464	2.85	1.57	-2.10
2	Submitting manuscripts as per the required format and style.	40	3.93	0.76	7.656*	464	3.97	1.48	14.04*
3	Asking editorial staff members about the status of their manuscript after submission.	40	4.13	1.02	6.993*	461	3.21	1.55	2.94
4	Waiting for the decision of the editors once they submitted their manuscripts.	40	4.00	0.93	6.774*	458	3.60	1.54	8.43
5	Revising their manuscripts in time when asked to do so.	40	3.75	1.10	4.298	460	3.78	1.54	10.90*
6	Losing hope if their paper has been rejected outright.	40	3.73	0.93	4.913	459	2.71	1.47	-4.20
7	Waiting for months until their work appears in print.	40	4.10	1.10	6.297*	454	3.34	1.39	5.13
	Grand Mean		3.94				3.35		

The header "Test Value = 3" spans the editors' and authors' responses columns.

Notes: 1=Not at all; 2= Lesser extent; 3=Uncertain; 4=Some extent; 5=Great extent; * p <. 005

As shown in Table 3, the mean-scores of responses of both groups with regard to authors' publication activities were marginally above the median point (i.e., 3 on the five–point Likert scale). They reported that authors submitted manuscripts as per the required format and style; asked the editorial staff members about the status of their

manuscripts; revised their manuscripts in time when they were requested to do so; and waited for months until their work appeared in print. On the other hand, though editors indicated that authors sought advice from editorial staff members about how the publication office handles submitted manuscripts (*Mean= 3.93; t=6.195, p < .005*), authors said they did this is to a lesser extent (*Mean= 2.85; t= -2.10, p < .005*). Furthermore, editors said that authors usually lose hope if their manuscripts are rejected outright (3.73), but instructors expressed the contrary (2.71).

Aside from authors (instructors/researchers) publication activities, efforts were made to examine the editorial responsibilities of editors. The mean score of authors' and editors' responses in relation to this are presented in the table below.

Table 4: Results related to the editorial responsibilities of editors

Item No	Details	Authors' responses				Editors' responses			
		N	Mean	SD	t*	N	Mean	SD	t*
1	Acknowledging the receipt of manuscripts.	427	3.89	1.34	13.63*	40	4.53	0.91	10.65*
2	Providing guidelines to authors for the effective and proper functioning of editorial processes.	429	3.56	1.41	8.20	40	4.73	0.68	16.07*
3	Sending manuscripts to potential reviewers.	422	3.73	1.34	11.11*	40	4.63	0.90	11.43
4	Processing manuscripts without discrimination.	419	3.60	1.32	9.35	40	4.90	0.63	19.00*
5	Treating manuscripts as confidential.	417	3.73	1.28	11.57*	40	5.00	0.00	a
6	Respecting intellectual independence.	420	3.75	1.30	11.82*	40	4.90	0.63	19.00*
7	Updating the status of submitted manuscripts.	422	3.64	1.38	9.63	40	4.45	1.08	8.45
8	Providing reviewers' comments to authors whenever they request.	422	3.70	1.42	10.19*	40	4.73	0.85	12.88*
9	Notifying the acceptance or rejection of manuscripts timely.	423	3.69	1.39	10.13*	40	4.83	0.50	23.06*
10	Providing the necessary professional supports to authors for the issuance of the manuscripts.	421	3.28	1.39	4.13	40	4.48	0.88	10.64
	Grand Mean		**3.66**				**4.71**		

*Notes: 1=Never; 2=Rarely; 3=Undecided; 4=Sometimes; 5=Always; * p <. 005*

[a] t cannot be computed because the standard deviation is 0.

The results in Table 4 showed preferential responses to the responsibilities of editors. Both groups gave favorable remarks. The

aggregate mean score of authors (3.66) and editors (4.71) also confirmed this; it was above the hypothetical mean score (median point).

Undertaking the publication processes

When a manuscript is submitted for publication, it passes through editorial process internationally. It undergoes a fairly standard editorial review process. The manuscript is assessed by editorial team to decide whether it is the type of article that they want to see in their journal and, if so, whether it is of an adequate standard to be sent out for peer-reviewers. If it meets the standard, the manuscript is sent to peer-reviewers to ensure its 'publishability'. That is, reviewers help editors select the best research works for publication in their journal. As per reviewers' comments, manuscript may be acceptable or unacceptable for publication on some grounds. As Weller (2001) states, this process (also known as refereeing) is essential not only for protecting the integrity of science and scholarly communication but also in assisting authors to enhance the scholarly levels of their manuscripts.

During the study, attempts were made to examine the editorial practices of the sampled universities. In so doing, editors were asked to indicate the publication process they carried out. Moreover, interviews were conducted with chief editorial staff and documents were reviewed. The results are presented here under.

Table 5: Editors' responses regarding their publication process

Details	N	Responses in %	
		Yes	No
1. Manuscript submission: You solicit and manage submitted manuscripts through:			
1.1. hand submission	40	65.0	35.0
1.2. mail	40	42.5	57.5
1.3. e-mail	40	80.0	20.0
2. Selecting reviewers: Your selection and/or assignment of reviewers is based on:			
2.1. expertise	40	95.0	5.0
2.2. reputation	40	72.5	27.5
2.3. specific recommendations	40	72.5	27.5
2.4. professional convent	40	62.5	37.5
2.5. willingness	40	77.5	22.5
2.6. previous experience of reviewers' characteristics	40	67.5	32.5
3. Copy-editing process: After the manuscript is accepted for publication,			
3.1. language editors carry out copy-editing.	40	65.0	35.0
3.2. members of the editorial board carry out copy-editing.	40	55.0	45.0
3.3. authors carry out copy-editing.	40	80.0	20.0
4. Production: After the issue is copy-edited and made camera-ready,			
4.1. it is sent to the designated publisher.	40	52.5	47.5
4.2. it is posted on a website.	40	75.0	25.0
5. Publication and dissemination: After the issue is published,			
5.1. copies of the issue are disseminated in hard copy.	40	50.0	50.0
5.2. copies of the issue are disseminated in soft copy.	40	55.0	45.0
5.3. some contents of the issue (eg. abstracts) are open accessed on website.	40	55.0	45.0
5.4. all contents of the issue are open accessed on a website.	40	47.5	52.5
5.5. copies of the issue are subscribed by institutions and individuals.	40	42.5	57.5
6. Documentation and promotion: In order to document and promote the issue,			
6.1. copies of the issue are indexed in libraries and indexing agencies.	40	37.5	62.5
6.2. some contents of the issue are prepared for a press release.	40	7.5	92.5
6.3. the web page of the issue is linked with various websites.	40	15.0	85.0

The above table shows that most manuscripts were submitted through e-mail (80%) and hand submission (65%). Moreover, editorial staff members basically chose reviewers on the basis of expertise (95%) and willingness of reviewers (77.5%). Academic reputation, specific recommendations, professional convent and their own previous experience of a reviewer's characteristics were among the criteria editors employed to select reviewers. After the manuscript had been accepted for publication, majority of the publication offices (80%) asked authors to carry out copy-editing. A significant number of the offices (65%) also carried out the copy-editing by hiring language editors. After the issue was copy-edited and made camera-ready, it was, according to majority of the editors, posted on a website (75%) and sent to the designated publisher for print copy (52.5%). What is more, having published an issue, editors disseminated it in a form of hard and soft copy. They also partially made the copies open access (55%). In fact, some of them reported that their issues were fully open accessed (47.5%). Sadly, most of the publication offices failed to document and promote the issue properly. They indicated that some contents of the issues were not meant for a press release (92.5%), and the web pages of issues were not linked with various websites (85%). They also failed to index their copies in libraries and indexing agencies (62.5%).

To countercheck the data obtained from editors, documents such as publication guidelines, publication manuals, and the websites of the sampled universities and publication hosting agencies were reviewed. Moreover, interviews were conducted with research and publication officers and chief editorial staff. The results disclosed that only few of the journals were open-accessed on African Online Journals (AJOL) and Ethiopian Online Journals (EJOL). That is, out of 27 Ethiopian journals hosted by AJOL, 19 were open-accessed. From this total, only 7 were from the sampled public universities (there were about 29 journals published in the sampled universities as well). In fact, some of the publication offices began to make their issues available on their respective university websites. The publication guidelines/manuals most editors used depicted that editors followed a globally acceptable

publication process. However, their practices of review process and reviewer selection varied. According to the interview data, for example, only few of the editorial staff carried out preliminary assessment; most of them sent manuscripts out for major assessment outright. Even though few of them had editorial committees that carefully selected peer-reviewers, majority of the editorial offices gave the mandate to the editors-in-chief and/or to the managing editors.

In academic publishing, the time-consuming nature of the peer review process can take several months (or even years in some fields) before a submitted manuscript is published. This is one of the most common complaints about academic publishing. The review process is voluntary and is done part-time. Editors can, therefore, not force reviewers to review a manuscript within a specific time limit. In addition to the time taken by reviewers to compile their review reports, the review process is also prolonged by activities within the editorial office itself (Ligthelm and Koekemoer, 2009). These may include registering manuscripts, selecting and recruiting appropriate reviewers, time available to the editor (who also acts in a voluntary capacity) and general academic routine. In the questionnaire, editors were asked about the duration of peer-review process from submission to decision to publish the article. The following results were obtained.
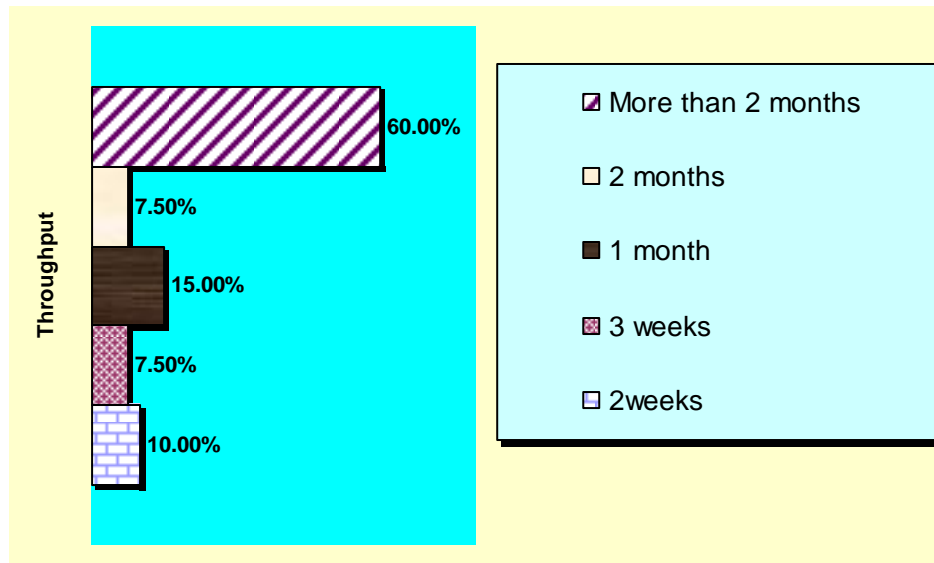
Figure 2: Duration of the peer review process from submission to decision to publish the article

Figure 2 shows that the duration of the peer-review process from submission to decision to publish an article took more than two months in most editorial offices (60%). Editors during the interview also said that the double blind peer-review process was the most challenging task in their editorial activities. They failed to get timely assessment reports from reviewers. They mentioned that they waited for two to three months in obtaining reviewers' feedbacks. However, document reviews (review of managing editors follow-up sheets) revealed that some review process took more than a year. The communications of the review reports to the authors were effected after a year.

In addition to the time taken by reviewers to compile their review reports, the review process is also prolonged by activities within the editorial office itself (Ligthelm and Koekemoer, 2009). These may include registering manuscripts, selecting and recruiting appropriate

reviewers, time available to the editor (who also acts in a voluntary capacity) and general academic routine. During the study, an attempt was made to look into the publication-through-put time of the journals. Most of the journals failed to clearly mention their publication-through-put time in their publication policies.

The study identified that as a result of sluggish editorial processes, most of the journals could not published their issues timely. That is, almost all of the journals did not publish current issues or made available their recent issues either on their websites or on that of their journal hosting organizations. Only back issues were available.

Challenges of Academic Publishing

As already noted previously, the nature of peer-review process is time-consuming. A manuscript passes through several processes before it is published. This is one of the most common complaints about academic publishing. By virtue of the researcher's position as an editor, he has especially heard different complaints about manuscripts submitted for publication from authors, reviewers and academics. In the study, attempts were made to identify the incongruities of authors and editors while involving academic publishing. The following major faults and mistakes were obtained among others.

Table 6: Responses of authors and editors regarding challenges in publishing articles

| Item No | Details | Test Value = 3 | | | | | | | |
| | | Authors' responses | | | | Editors' responses | | | |
		N	Mean	SD	t*	N	Mean	SD	t*
1	Lack of incentive/motivation	437	3.68	1.42	10.04*	40	3.60	1.50	2.53
2	Limited language competence in writing articles	442	2.67	1.44	-4.85	40	3.75	1.06	4.49
3	Lack of research skills	439	2.55	1.40	-6.71	40	3.73	1.15	3.97
4	Choosing where to publish	439	3.16	1.49	2.24	40	3.10	1.24	0.51
5	Unfair selection of reviewers	438	2.77	1.33	-3.64	40	2.40	1.30	-2.93
6	Lengthy/long publication process	441	3.47	1.38	7.11	40	3.43	1.36	1.98
7	Conflicts of interest between editors and/or reviewers and authors	439	2.68	1.35	-4.94	40	2.53	1.30	-2.31
8	Insufficient budget allocation.	441	3.90	1.29	14.60*	40	3.48	1.65	1.82
9	Destructive reviewers' comments	440	2.63	1.34	-5.81	40	2.38	1.13	-3.51
10	Continuous rejection of submitted articles	438	2.29	1.34	-11.16	40	2.23	1.00	-4.90
	Grand Mean		2.98				3.06		

*Notes: 1=Not at all; 2=Lesser extent; 3=Uncertain; 4=Some extent; 5=Great extent; * p <. 005*

The mean score for the first item in Table 6 showed that lack of intensive/motivation was one of the major incongruities of academic publishing; authors were not motivated to publish. Moreover, even though authors rated that their research skills and language competence in writing articles were below the medium mean value, in the table above the hypothetical mean scores of editors' responses indicated a limited language competence in producing publishable articles (Mean= 3.75; t= 4.49, p < .005) and lack of research skills (Mean= 3.73; t= 3.97, p < .005). These were the challenges of authors to publish their research outlets. The mean value of both groups of the respondents indicated that choosing where to publish was not a

serious absurdity (authors' mean=3.16; SD=1.49) and editors' mean=3.10; SD=1.24). Insufficient budget allocation was also among the challenges of academic publishing; majority of the authors (Mean= 3.90; t= 14.60, p < .005) and editors (Mean= 3.48; t= 1.82, p < .005) rated it as an absurd factor for publishing research articles. In fact, both groups indicated that unfair selection of reviewers, conflicts of interest between editors and/or reviewers and authors, destructive comments of reviewers, and continuous rejection of submitted manuscripts were not the negatively contributing factors for publishing research outputs of academics.

Evaluation of Reputability of Journals

During the course of the study, the researcher could not find a national quality assurance system for ensuring the reputability of academic journals published within the country. Therefore, he tried to examine how evaluation and accreditation of the journals were undertaken. In doing so, interviews made with publication officers and editorial staff members, and the senate legislations of the universities were reviewed. The researcher has also tried to collect and assess the evaluation criteria used by universities to decide reputability.

The study revealed that in Addis Ababa University, the Research and Publications Committee (RPC) is responsible to determine reputability criteria and re-assess the reputability of journals every three years (AAU, 2013). However, in Bahir Dar University (BDU), Hawassa University (HU), Jimma University (JU) and Mekelle University (MU) reputability of journals was determined by the University's Research and Development Committee (HU, 2011; BDU, 2014; JU, MU). The interview with publication officers and editorial staff members also indicated that the reputability assessment of the journals was left to the universities in which the journals were housed; no external body evaluated and accredited them. Interviewees also questioned the reputability of some journals even though they were given one by their university's regulatory body.

Although efforts were made to collect and study the criteria universities use for assessing their journals, it was difficult for the researcher to find them in some of the sampled universities such as Bahir Dar, Hawassa and Mekelle. The journal evaluation criteria of Addis Ababa University were adapted by Jimma University. The criteria were set based on indicators such as scholarly quality of research articles, rigor of the review process, editors' scholarly profile, timeliness of journal publication, number and diversity of articles per issue, editorial policies, the distribution of journal, indexing, basic publishing standards and style and format of journal.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions can be made.

1) Research and publication have been given marginal attention though research has been considered as one of the three pillars of higher education institution. That is, though the universities have envisioned excellence in teaching, research and community services, academics have engaged more in the teaching-learning. Academic publishing is almost taken as a subsidiary activity in the sampled public universities.

2) When a manuscript is submitted for publication, it is believed that it has undergone a fairly standard editorial scrutiny. However, the editorial practices of the sampled universities were found to be lengthy though they promised authors that their manuscripts would be published within a short time. The processes they employed to select reviewers, edit accepted articles, print issues and disseminate copies were stretched.

3) Even though the sampled universities established offices in charge of research and publication, the linkage between those offices and publication offices/units seemed to be loose. They did not set up clear plans to guide their academic publishing practices based on the reality on the ground. They did not even

have common understanding of academic publishing. What is more, although there are editorial teams that are responsible for the issuance of scholarly publications, communication between authors and editors was low; proper feedback was not provided.

4) Although the primary reason for publishing is to disseminate knowledge, its purpose seems to have shifted more in favor of promotion. Many academics no longer write papers for the sake of sharing knowledge; they published to get promoted. They are also under the illusion that the more they publish, the more they will impress the world.

5) Only a few journals published in the sampled public universities were reputable. However, the systematic procedures regarding determining the reputability of journals were not uniform. There is no any clear academic publishing policy across the country. "A reputable journal in a certain university is not in the eyes of another".

6) In the era of the World Wide Web, it is possible for research findings to be disseminated free of charge to anyone who wishes to read them. Making academic publications accessible has been hailed as an improvement in these days. Open-access publications are recently showing extraordinary growth. However, most of the editors consider open-access journals to be "trendy" but likely to fail in the face of traditional publishing. Thus, they relied on print-on-paper which is costly.

7. Recommendations

Based on the results of the present study, the following recommendations were suggested:

✓ Universities should give attention to academic publishing along with the teaching learning.
✓ Online tracking systems should be employed.

- ✓ Attempts should be made to post open-access scholarly publications on hosting agencies, such as AJOL and EJOL.
- ✓ A common academic publishing policy should be set across the country.
- ✓ Workshops should be arranged for reviewers and editors.

References

AAU (2013). *Addis Ababa University: Senate Legislation. Revised*: AAU Printing Press.

Ajao, O.G. (2005). *Some Reasons for Manuscript Rejection by Peer-Reviewed Journals.* **Annals of Ibadan Postgraduate Medicine, 3(2),** 9-12. Retrieved from *http://indexmedicus.afro.who.int/iah/fulltext/journals.pdf*

Ayalew Shibesh, Dawit Mekonnen, Tesfaye Semela, & Yalew Endawoke. (2009). Assessment of Science Education Quality Indicators in Addis Ababa, Bahir Dar, and Hawassa Universities. In: ***Quality of Higher Education in Ethiopian Public Institutions***, pp. 161-264, Addis Ababa: Forum for Social StudiesBordage, G. (2001). *Reasons reviewers reject and accept manuscripts: the strengths and weaknesses in medical education reports.* Acad Med, 76(9),889–896.

BDU (2014). HU (2010). Bahir Dar University Senate Legislation

Best, W. J. & Kahan, V. J. (1995). **Research Method in Education**. New Delhi: Prentice-Hall.

Bordage, G. (2001) . *Reasons reviewers reject and accept manuscripts: the strengths and weaknesses in medical education reports.* **Acad Med**, 76(9),889–896.

Byrne, D.W. (1998). Publishing your medical research paper. What they don't teach in medical school. Baltimore: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Casper, S. (2012).The Ironies of Academic Publishing: The System Is Stupid and It's Time for a New Manifesto. *London School of Economics. Retrieved on October 14, 2018 from* https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/07/26/ironies-academic-publishing-new-manifesto/

Elizabeth Ayalew (2012). Peer Review Mechanisms - The Bottleneck of Academic Freedom. Proceedings of the 9th National Conference on Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) in Ethiopia. August 20, 2011 UNECA Conference Center, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. *Retrieved on October 14, 2018 from www.smuc.edu.et › phocadownload*

Habtamu Wondimu. (2000). *The Loose Link between Educational Research and Policy/Decision Making in Ethiopia: Some Observations.* **Proceedings of the National Conference on Current Issues of Educational Research in Ethiopia**.

HU (2010). Hawassa University Senate Legislation

Körner,A.M. (2008). **Guide to Publishing a Scientific Paper**. New York: Routledge

Ligthelm, A.A. & Koekemoer, E.M. (2009). Academic publishing: Lessons learnt from the *Southern African Business Review.* **Southern African Business Review**, 13(3), 28-50.

Lüttge, U. (2011). *Publishing Journals and Books.* A power point presentation at a workshop on 'Standardization of Ethiopian Scientific Journals and Books', March 14-17, 2011. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Peat, J. (2002). **Scientific Writing Easy when you Know How**. London: BMJ Books.[electronic version]

Savenije, B. & Smith, J. (2003). **Towards new models in academic publishing.** Retrieved from

Tesfaye Semela. (2011). *Educational Research and the Ethiopian Journal of Education (EJE) in the Past Decade (2000-2009): Contributions, Downsides, and the Way Forward.* **The Ethiopian Journal of Education**, 31(2), 107-143.

Weller, A.C. (2001). *Editorial Peer Review, its Strengths and Weaknesses.* American Society for Information Science and Technology. Medford, NJ: Information Today.