

Why Publish and Why Collaborate? A Qualitative Study of Co-Authors' Motivations in Educational Research

Larry F. Cajelo¹, Genalyn L. Capelo², Ruby L. Mamaug³, Donabel A. Dumelod², Charlie T. Anselmo²

¹Graduate School, Saint Paul University, Manila Philippines

ORCID #: 0009-0004-2472-4449

²Isabela State University, Cauayan City, Isabela, Philippines 3305

Orcid #0009-0003-8543-5918 /Email ID : charlie.t.anselmo@isu.edu.ph

³Isabela State University, Cabagan, Isabela, Philippines 3305

ORCID iD: 0009-0007-0736-6426 /Email ID : ruby.l.mamaug@isu.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

Academic publishing and research collaboration are central to knowledge production, professional identity formation, and institutional advancement in higher education. Despite extensive scholarship on publication productivity and lead authorship, the perspectives and lived experiences of academic co-authors remain underexplored, particularly through qualitative inquiry. This study examined the motivations, experiences, perceived benefits, and challenges of scholarly publishing and research collaboration among academic co-authors in the fields of science and education. Using a qualitative research design, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with sixteen (16) academic co-authors and analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings indicate that co-authors perceive academic publishing as a core component of their professional identity, institutional responsibility, and societal contribution. Their motivations reflect an interplay of intrinsic factors—such as curiosity, passion for learning, and commitment to knowledge advancement—and extrinsic factors, including promotion requirements and institutional expectations. Research collaboration was viewed as a strategic mechanism for collective learning, mentoring, skill development, and enhanced research quality, although participants also reported challenges related to financial constraints, time management, communication, and uncertainties in the publication process. By foregrounding co-authors' lived experiences rather than productivity metrics or lead authorship status, this study provides a nuanced understanding of scholarly publishing and collaboration. The findings offer valuable insights for fostering ethical, inclusive, and sustainable research collaborations in higher education.

Keywords: *academic publishing, co-authorship, professional identity, research collaboration, scholarly publishing, qualitative research.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Academic publishing is significant in higher education, extending beyond the mere generation and dissemination of knowledge. It plays a crucial role in career advancement and enhancing the university's reputation. Researchers publish their findings to share new insights and advance their field. For scholars, publishing is essential because it demonstrates their productivity and establishes their credibility. Universities often consider faculty publications when assessing and promoting their staff members. An institution's reputation is closely linked to the quantity and quality of its faculty publications, making publishing a primary focus for universities. Research frequently involves collaboration, especially when addressing complex issues that require expertise from various fields. Teamwork combines diverse skills, resulting in more comprehensive and extensive research outcomes. Collaboration also facilitates resource sharing, mentoring, and the exchange of different viewpoints, thereby enriching the research. It supports knowledge sharing and skill development, ultimately enhancing research quality and fostering innovation. This emphasis on collaboration underscores

the necessity of addressing complex challenges that transcend a single discipline, aligning with the evolving nature of research in higher-education. Thus, academic publishing not only disseminates individual research but also highlights achievements made through teamwork and collective effort. However, publishing is not without its challenges. Researchers face pressure to publish, often referred to as "publish or perish," which can lead to stress and ethical concerns regarding credit allocation and paper preparation (Drosou et al., 2019; D'Souza et al., 2018). Most studies focus on productivity, institutional outputs, or the perspectives of lead authors but frequently overlook the experiences and viewpoints of co-authors, whose contributions and motivations are often neglected (Thompson et al., 2022).

Understanding why scholars choose to publish and collaborate is crucial for fostering sustainable and equitable research partnerships. Despite extensive research on publication productivity and lead authorship, the lived experiences, motivations, and collaborative dynamics of co-authors remain underexplored through qualitative inquiry, particularly in science and education research. While the motivations for publishing extend beyond career advancement to include knowledge

dissemination and the benefits of collaboration, these aspects have not been thoroughly examined qualitatively in the existing literature (D'Souza et al., 2018). Moreover, the lack of qualitative research capturing the authentic voices of co-authors creates a significant gap, limiting a comprehensive understanding of authorship dynamics and collaborative practices in academia (Thompson et al., 2022).

In the fields of science and education, research collaboration plays a vital role in mentoring emerging scholars, enhancing research capabilities and enabling interdisciplinary inquiry. Collaborative efforts facilitate knowledge exchange across disciplines and contribute to professional growth, improving research outcomes and fostering innovation. Co-authorship, in particular, represents tangible connections between researchers working together on scholarly projects, making it essential to examine co-authors' experiences to understand how collaboration functions in genuine research partnerships. Investigating co-authors who actively engage with lead researchers offers nuanced insights into collaboration decisions and reveals the practical workings of these partnerships, including the benefits and challenges encountered by contributing authors.

Accordingly, this study aimed to explore the lived experiences, motivations, perceived benefits, and challenges associated with academic publishing and collaborative research among academic coauthors. By foregrounding the voices of co-authors, this study seeks to provide deeper insights into how collaborations are initiated, sustained, and experienced in education and science research, thereby informing strategies for developing more effective and enduring collaborative research partnerships in the future.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Main Research Question

How do academic co-authors describe their motivations and experiences in scholarly publishing and research collaboration?

Specific Research Questions

How do academic co-authors perceive the importance of scholarly publishing for their professional and personal development?

What motivates academic co-authors to engage in scholarly publishing?

What factors encourage academic co-authors to participate in research collaborations and co-authorship?

What benefits do academic co-authors perceive in collaborative research and publishing?

What challenges do academic co-authors encounter in scholarly publishing and research collaboration?

3. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Academic Publishing in Higher Education

Academic publishing is crucial for the progression of knowledge and educational practices in higher education, as it enables the spread of research results and new

teaching methods. Peer-reviewed journals, known for their rigorous standards, play a significant role in the evolution of various disciplines, affecting both the theoretical and practical aspects of science and education (Rokhmani et al., 2019). These journals are vital for disseminating fresh insights that can improve educational results and guide the development of evidence-based policies. Publishing is essential for establishing academic authority and serves as a measure of scholarly expertise that directly influences faculty members' chances of promotion, tenure, and professional acknowledgment. Institutions heavily depend on publication records to assess faculty performance, making them a crucial factor in academic career progression (Vecaldo et al., 2019). Additionally, an institution's reputation and ranking are greatly affected by the collective research output and impact of its faculty, highlighting the importance of academic publishing in maintaining institutional prestige. In the realms of science and education, publishing is a fundamental expectation of the faculty's role. Academics are anticipated to teach, actively participate in research, and contribute to scholarly communities through publications. This expectation embodies the dual mission of higher-education institutions to foster knowledge creation alongside education, ensuring a dynamic environment in which teaching is informed by the latest research (Craig, 2020). Together, these aspects underscore scholarly publishing as an essential component of academic life and institutions' success.

Motivations for Academic Publishing

Academic publishing is driven by a combination of internal and external factors that collectively influence researchers' engagement and output. Internal factors include the desire for knowledge, commitment to advancing the field, and personal fulfillment from scholarly inquiry and knowledge creation (Peng & Gao, 2019). Researchers motivated by these internal elements often pursue publication out of passion for discovery and commitment to deepening their understanding rather than for external rewards (Drosou et al., 2019). These motivations are positively associated with consistent research productivity and high-quality work. External motivations include career advancement, professional recognition, institutional mandates, and the requirements of academic evaluation systems (Peng & Gao, 2019; Zhao et al., 2024). Researchers often publish to meet promotion criteria, secure funding, and gain academic prestige. While external incentives can drive publication efforts, excessive reliance on them may reduce intrinsic interest and negatively affect the quality of research. Publishing also plays a vital role in shaping professional identity by establishing researchers' credibility, visibility, and sense of belonging within academic communities. The publishing process helps scholars define themselves as experts and contributes to their ongoing development as academic professionals (Kotera et al., 2021). This affirmation of identity enhances motivation and encourages participation in future academic endeavors. Together, internal and external drivers shape the complex motivations behind academic publishing, underscoring the need for balanced support systems that nurture both to sustain scholarly productivity and integrity.

Research Collaboration and Co-Authorship

Collaborative research has experienced significant growth in science and interdisciplinary education, reflecting the increasing recognition of the value of collective expertise in addressing complex problems. Large-scale studies, such as those conducted by the Endocrinology and Metabolism Research Institute, demonstrate rising trends in international and interdisciplinary cooperation, with thousands of authors from multiple countries collaborating to produce impactful publications (Shahmoradi et al., 2020). Similarly, interdisciplinary education embraces collaboration to integrate diverse perspectives, enrich research output, and foster innovation. Co-authorship serves as a vital mechanism for sharing expertise, dividing research responsibilities, and pooling resources. By collaborating through co-authorship, researchers can leverage each other's specialized knowledge and skills, thereby enhancing the breadth and depth of study design, analysis, and dissemination (Di Bella et al., 2021). Co-authored works also often indicate a shared commitment to quality and rigor, distributed tasks, and a more comprehensive validation of the findings. Collaboration is widely recognized as an effective strategy for improving research quality and productivity. Internationally co-authored articles tend to have higher citation rates, reflecting their greater academic impact and visibility. The growth of collaborative networks has been shown to drive increased publication output and innovation, especially when aligned with institutional incentives and global research trends (Kwiek, 2020). Overall, collaboration supported by co-authorship strengthens research by promoting knowledge flow, enhancing scientific rigor, and increasing productivity across disciplines.

Benefits and Challenges of Collaborative Research

Engaging in collaborative research brings a host of advantages, such as mentorship, skill enhancement, and more opportunities for publication. Within collaborative groups, mentorship plays a crucial role in upholding scientific integrity and ethical behavior, guiding mentees through intricate research structures and publication procedures while supporting their career advancement (Bredella et al., 2019; Bukusi et al., 2018). These research teams also foster skill development by allowing members to exchange knowledge and learn from each other, leading to better research results and increased productivity (McClunie-Trust et al., 2022). Additionally, collaboration broadens publication prospects through collective efforts that integrate diverse viewpoints and resources (Dusdal & Powell, 2021). However, challenges often arise regarding workload distribution, authorship acknowledgment, and time constraints. To prevent disputes stemming from unequal contributions or perceived unfairness in recognition, it is crucial to establish clear communication and agree on authorship criteria early (Oliver et al., 2018). Time pressure and the need to balance collaboration with other professional responsibilities can impede progress and strain team relationships. Power dynamics and leadership roles are significant in collaborative research processes. In multinational or interdisciplinary teams,

differences in decision-making authority can sideline less senior or local researchers, impacting fair participation and authorship decisions (Zreik et al., 2022). Effective leadership that encourages transparency, inclusivity, and accountability can help manage these dynamics and create a collaborative atmosphere that appreciates all contributions and maximizes team efficiency (Patel et al., 2021).

Co-Authors' Experiences and Research Gaps

There is a noticeable lack of qualitative research that delves into the personal experiences and motivations of co-authors, leaving a gap in understanding the factors that encourage researchers to work together and publish jointly (Brewis, 2018). Current studies often miss the subtle perspectives of co-authors, concentrating instead on quantitative metrics, such as publication numbers or bibliometric networks, which fail to capture the full complexity of collaborative choices. Moreover, there is a scarcity of comprehensive studies that explore both publishing and collaboration decisions simultaneously, thus overlooking how co-authors manage the intertwined challenges of authorship credit, workload sharing and collaborative dynamics (Brewis, 2018; Crampsie et al., 2020). Highlighting co-authors' perspectives through qualitative research is crucial for developing sustainable and ethical research partnerships. Such methods uncover how co-authors view and handle their roles, contributions, and recognition within research teams, bringing to light issues of fairness, power, and equity that are often hidden in purely quantitative studies (Brewis, 2018). Additionally, gaining insights into co-authors' experiences can shed light on the social and cultural factors that affect collaboration, including disciplinary norms, institutional pressures and resource availability. By combining co-authors' lived experiences with publication and collaboration data, future research can more effectively create policies and practices that promote ethical authorship, fair collaboration, and increased research productivity, thereby fostering trust and satisfaction among researchers in academia's increasingly collaborative environments.

4. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative methodology, specifically a generic qualitative inquiry, to delve into the lived experiences, motivations, and perceptions of academic co-authors regarding scholarly publishing and research collaboration. This method was considered suitable for capturing detailed, in-depth narratives that shed light on the personal, professional, and relational elements influencing involvement in collaborative research. These phenomena are intricate, context-specific, and insufficiently explored using quantitative approaches.

Participants of the Study

The participants were academic co-authors who had previously collaborated with the lead researcher on at least one completed, accepted, or published scholarly work in the fields of science, education, or interdisciplinary

research. Purposive maximum variation sampling was employed to ensure diversity in collaboration frequency, career stage, and disciplinary background. A minimum of sixteen (16) participants was targeted to provide sufficient depth and variation of perspectives and to support the attainment of thematic saturation, particularly given the heterogeneity of participants' research experiences. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were offered. To protect anonymity and minimize potential power-related bias, participants were assigned alphanumeric codes, and no identifying personal or institutional information was collected or disclosed.

Profile of the respondents in Published paper

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide consisting of five (5) open-ended questions designed to elicit reflective and narrative responses. The interview questions focused on key areas aligned with the research objectives, including the meaning and importance of academic publishing, motivations for engaging in research collaboration, perceived benefits of coauthorship, and challenges encountered in the publishing and collaborative research processes. The interview guide was content-validated by two experts in qualitative research to ensure its clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were gathered through individual online interviews conducted via secure video conferencing or digital communication platforms. Participants received a formal invitation explaining the study's purpose, interview procedures, and ethical safeguards. Written informed consent was obtained prior to their participation.

Interviews were conducted at mutually convenient times and lasted approximately 30–45 minutes. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and securely stored in a password-protected digital repository accessible only to the researchers involved in the study.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) initial coding, (3) theme generation, (4) review of themes, (5) definition and naming of themes, and (6) interpretation of themes. Coding was conducted manually to allow for close engagement with the data and preserve contextual meaning. Emergent patterns were organized into themes reflecting co-authors' motivations for publishing, reasons for engaging in collaboration, perceived benefits, and challenges associated with scholarly publishing and collaborative research. Thematic saturation was achieved when successive interviews yielded no new codes or

themes, indicating that sufficient depth and variation in the participants' perspectives had been attained.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure rigor and trustworthiness, this study applied credibility, dependability, and confirmability criteria. Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement with the data, careful immersion in the participants' narratives, and the use of verbatim quotations to accurately reflect their perspectives. Dependability was established by maintaining a transparent and systematic audit trail documenting the research design, data collection procedures, and stages of thematic analysis. Confirmability was ensured by grounding the interpretations in the data and through reflexive consideration of the researcher's positionality, particularly in light of prior collaborative relationships with participants. Reflexive practices were employed throughout the research process to minimize potential bias and ensure that the findings were shaped by the participants' accounts rather than the researcher's assumptions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly followed throughout this study. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and their rights as research participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured through the use of participant codes and the exclusion of identifying information. Given the existing collaborative relationship between the researcher and the participants, particular emphasis was placed on the voluntary nature of participation and the absence of any academic, professional, or authorship-related consequences for nonparticipation. All data will be securely stored and disposed of according to institutional research ethics guidelines.

RESULTS

Figure 1 Distribution of paper co-authorship by author code

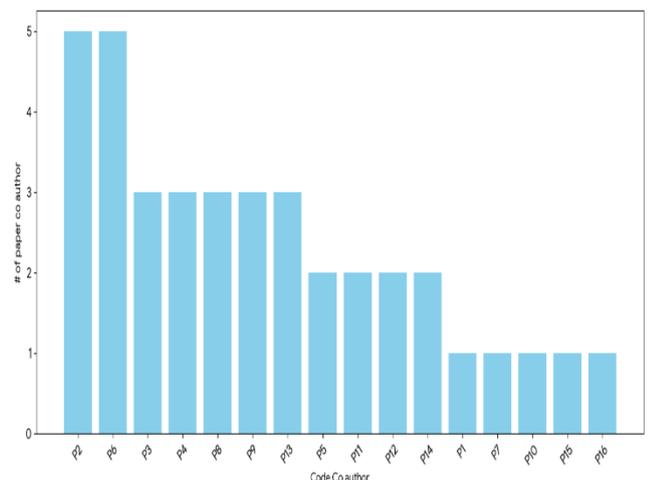


Figure 1. Distribution of Paper Co-Authorship by Author Code

Figure 1 depicts the distribution of academic papers where each participant is listed as a co-author, using anonymized author identifiers. This figure illustrates the frequency of co-authored papers within the study's scope, showcasing the differences in collaborative participation among the participants. Some co-authors are linked to a greater number of joint publications, while others are less frequently involved, indicating variations in collaboration intensity, research engagement, and project involvement. It is important to note that the figure does not reflect the total number of publications any participant has produced as a primary or lead author, nor does it represent individual research productivity or overall scholarly output. Instead, it is solely focused on co-authored papers related to the collaborative experiences analyzed in this study. Therefore, a higher or lower frequency in Figure 1 should not be seen as an indicator of academic performance, seniority, or publication capacity. This distinction is crucial because the purpose of Figure 1 is descriptive rather than evaluative. The visualization aims to provide context for participants' collaborative exposure and to support the qualitative exploration of co-authors' lived experiences, motivations, and challenges in research collaboration. By concentrating solely on co-authorship patterns, the figure aligns with the study's goal to emphasize the relational and experiential aspects of collaboration, rather than the productivity metrics commonly highlighted in bibliometric analyses.

Theme 1 Academic Publishing as Professional Identity and Responsibility

Theme	Description	Responses
Knowledge Sharing and Scholarly Contribution	Participants viewed academic publishing as a responsibility to disseminate research findings, share innovations, and contribute to the collective body of knowledge in their respective fields. Publishing was described as a means of advancing learning, supporting evidence-based practice, and engaging in scholarly discourse.	P1: "Academic publishing is showcasing or sharing discoveries and innovations and their impact to both learners and educators." P6: "Publish academic work to share to the pool of knowledge in a specific field." P7: "Sharing knowledge and contributing to my field." P9: "It is one way of disseminating research output and contributing new knowledge to the academic community."
Professional Identity and	Academic publishing was also framed as	P5: "Academic publishing is a way of validating my

Academic Credibility	central to participants' professional identity as researchers. Respondents emphasized validation through peer review, accountability, credibility, and recognition within the academic community, which reinforced their role as legitimate scholars.	research and making it accessible to others." P8: "It helps me improve as a researcher through feedback and recognition." P11: "It ensures scholarly accountability and academic impact." P15: "It is the process of sharing knowledge and establishing credibility."
Institutional and Societal Responsibility	Participants described publishing as part of their duty as faculty members, aligning with institutional expectations, promotion systems, and broader societal contributions. Publishing was seen as supporting university goals, career advancement, and national or community development.	P2: "Academic upgrade and way to promotion." P12: "Publishing a paper means fulfilling your role in advancing society and the nation." P14: "It is an avenue for sharing research findings and a pathway to advancing my career in the academe." P16: "Academic publishing is about contributing to learning and progress and helping society better understand the world."

The results suggest that academic publishing plays a crucial role in shaping co-authors' professional identity and responsibility. Participants regarded publishing as a means of sharing knowledge, building credibility, and meeting their obligations to both their institutions and society. This perspective is consistent with the existing literature that highlights publishing as a fundamental expectation in academia and a tool for scholarly accountability and enhancing institutional reputation (Craig, 2020; Rokhmani et al., 2019). The focus on credibility and validation through peer review aligns with earlier findings that publishing aids identity formation and professional legitimacy within academic circles (Kotera et al., 2021). Additionally, participants' view of publishing as a duty to society and the academic community reflects studies that emphasize the broader social role of higher-

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 education research in promoting evidence-based practices and public knowledge (Vecaldo et al., 2019).

Theme 2: Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations for Publishing

Theme	Description	Responses
Intrinsic Motivation: Passion for Learning and Knowledge Advancement	Many participants described internal motivations for publishing, including curiosity, passion for research, desire for continuous learning, and commitment to advancing knowledge. Publishing was viewed as a means of intellectual growth and personal fulfillment rather than solely external rewards.	P1: "Continuous navigation on the improvement and enhancement of quality education." P3: "It helps me to learn more and continue to grow." P8: "I want my studies to make a positive impact and be useful to others." P10: "It's on passion and curiosity since I am in the academe." P11: "I am motivated by the desire to advance my knowledge and address academic or societal challenges."
Extrinsic Motivation: Promotion, Incentives, and Recognition	Participants also emphasized external motivators such as promotion requirements, incentives, institutional expectations, and academic recognition. Publishing was often described as a necessary pathway for career advancement and professional acknowledgment within the university system.	P2: "For promotion, academic development with friends." P4: "Of course for promotion in JC3." P9: "It is one of the requirements in the promotion in the University." P12: "It is the incentive that comes with it." P14: "It is an avenue and a requirement for promotion in the academe."

Blended Motivation: Contribution, Growth, and Institutional Alignment	Several participants expressed a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, where personal growth, contribution to knowledge, and institutional responsibilities intersected. Publishing was seen as both meaningful service and a professional necessity.	P5: "To contribute to knowledge, support other researchers, and gain academic and professional growth." P7: "To advance language research, share findings, and build a professional reputation." P13: "To help support the agenda of the University and help the community." P16: "To contribute new knowledge, solve real-world problems, and support academic and professional growth."
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The study's findings clearly demonstrate the presence of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Participants highlighted intrinsic motivations such as curiosity, a passion for learning, and a desire to contribute to knowledge, alongside extrinsic factors such as promotion requirements, incentives, and institutional expectations. This duality aligns with previous research indicating that academic publishing is driven by both internal satisfaction and external reward systems (Drosou et al., 2019; Peng & Gao, 2019). Notably, this combination of motivations suggests that intrinsic and extrinsic factors are not mutually exclusive but function concurrently. This supports the notion that balanced motivational systems are crucial for maintaining research productivity and quality, especially in environments where promotion systems heavily emphasize publication output (Zhao et al., 2024; D'Souza et al., 2018).

Theme 3 : Collaboration as a Strategy for Learning and Productivity

Theme	Description	Responses
Knowledge Sharing and Collective Learning	Participants viewed collaboration as a means of sharing ideas, brainstorming, and learning	P1: "Collaboration means to help each other in sharing knowledge to more education"

	<p>from their co-authors. Working with others enables the exchange of perspectives, enhancement of understanding, and collective problem-solving, contributing to stronger research outputs.</p>	<p>communities around the world.” P3: “To engage other co-authors and brainstorming when it comes to studies in research.” P8: “Working with others allows us to share ideas and strengthen the quality of our research.” P9: “Opportunity to learn from other researchers and gain new knowledge based on best research practices.”</p>
<p>Complementary Expertise and Improved Research Quality</p>	<p>Many participants emphasized that collaboration brings together complementary skills and expertise, leading to more reliable, valid, and high-quality research. Co-authorship was considered a means to enhance study design, analysis, and overall rigor.</p>	<p>P4: “We typically collaborate based on complementary expertise and shared intellectual contributions.” P5: “The opportunity to share expertise influenced my decision to collaborate.” P11: “Complementary expertise, shared research interests, and diverse perspectives improved research quality.” P16: “Shared research interests and complementary expertise help improve research quality.”</p>
<p>Professional Growth, Mentorship, and Network Expansion</p>	<p>Collaboration was also described as a strategy for professional development, mentoring, and expanding academic</p>	<p>P2: “Academic development and friends.” P6: “The opportunity to work with a broader academic community.” P12: “It widens</p>

	<p>networks. Participants highlighted the value of working with experienced researchers and building relationships that support productivity and career growth.</p>	<p>your horizon and allows you to work with people who are experts in research.” P13: “Shared research interests, access to other resources, leadership, and mentoring sessions.”</p>
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The findings on collaboration underscore its importance as a strategic tool for learning, mentoring, and enhancing research productivity. Participants highlighted that sharing knowledge, leveraging complementary expertise, and solving problems collectively were key motivations for co-authoring papers. These insights support the existing evidence that collaboration enhances research rigor, innovation, and output by integrating diverse skills and perspectives (Di Bella et al., 2021; Kwiec 2020). The focus on mentorship and professional development identified by participants also aligns with studies recognizing collaborative research as a vital setting for capacity building and academic growth, particularly for early- and mid-career researchers (Bredella et al., 2019; Bukusi et al., 2018). Thus, collaboration serves not only as a strategy for productivity but also as a formative learning experience in academic practices.

Theme 4: Benefits of Co-Authorship

Theme	Description	Responses
<p>Skill Development and Knowledge Enhancement</p>	<p>The participants reported that co-authorship enhanced their research, writing, and analytical skills. Collaborative work allows them to learn new methodologies, gain broader perspectives, and improve the overall quality of their scholarly work.</p>	<p>P5: “Co-authorship has allowed me to learn new methodologies and produce higher-quality publications.” P8: “I have gained new knowledge and skills from working with other researchers.” P9: “I improved and enhanced my research skills and increased my research productivity.” P16: “Collaborative research enhanced the quality and rigor of my work</p>

		through shared expertise.”
Increased Productivity and Research Quality	Co-authorship was viewed as a practical strategy for increasing research productivity and producing more rigorous outputs. Sharing responsibilities and combining expertise made research tasks more manageable and outcomes more robust.	P6: “Two hands (brains) is always better than one.” P11: “I gained broader insights and stronger research outputs.” P14: “There is an easier way of writing the paper and the tasks become shared.” P4: “Collaborative research yields enhanced innovation and improved research outcomes.”
Professional Recognition and Network Expansion	Participants highlighted that co-authorship provides opportunities for career advancement, visibility, and expansion of academic networks. Publishing with others helps build professional relationships, increase recognition, and support promotion and future opportunities.	P1: “Seeing your name with other authors gives recognition and can be used for promotion.” P2: “Promotion points.” P7: “Broader perspectives and increased publication impact.” P12: “I gained insights and connections with other researchers.”

Consistent with existing research, co-authorship is linked to skill development, heightened productivity, and broader professional connections. The participants noted improvements in their research and writing abilities, better publication quality, and greater academic visibility. These advantages align with earlier studies indicating that collaborative research promotes methodological learning, boosts publication impact and enhances academic networks (Mcclunie-Trust et al., 2022; Dusdal & Powell, 2021). The perceived connection between co-authorship and career progression further bolsters the argument that collaboration enhances both individual and institutional research performance. This supports the notion that co-authorship is more than just a division of tasks; it is a synergistic process that expands the scholarly capacity and influence.

Theme 5: Challenges and Tensions in Collaborative Research

Theme	Description	Responses
Financial Constraints and Publication Costs	Participants frequently identified financial challenges, particularly publication and processing fees, as major obstacles in collaborative research. These constraints often required shared financial responsibility or collective problem-solving among co-authors.	P1: “Financial constraints.” P2: “Paying the publication fee.” P3: “With the help of my collaborators, we were able to address financial difficulties.” P4: “High costs and resource limitations present significant hurdles.”
Time Management and Coordination Issues	Managing time, coordinating schedules, and meeting deadlines emerged as persistent challenges. Participants noted that conflicting commitments and differing timelines among co-authors often slowed the research and publication process.	P6: “Time management.” P7: “Communication issues and differing timelines.” P10: “Time is the most challenging thing in academic research.” P14: “Coordination and logistics since time is a necessary factor.”
Communication, Role Clarity, and Differing Perspectives	Participants highlighted challenges related to communication gaps, differences in ideas, and unclear roles among the collaborators. These tensions were often managed through open	P8: “Coordinating with co-authors and meeting deadlines can be challenging.” P9: “Different ideas and writing styles can be addressed through open communication and defined roles.” P12: “Differences in

	communication, clear role assignments, and mutual respect.	ideas and communication among co-researchers.” P16: “Communication gaps and differing opinions addressed through clear roles and regular communication.”
Structural and Review Process Uncertainty	Some participants pointed to challenges beyond the research team, such as unpredictability in peer review and changes in journal editorial practices, which contributed to uncertainty and delays in publication.	P11: “High publication expectations.” P13: “Unpredictability of peer review due to changes in editorial leadership.” P4: “Structural barriers in higher education settings affect publishing.”

While the benefits were recognized, participants highlighted ongoing challenges related to financial constraints, time management, communication, and uncertainties in the publication process. Financial barriers, particularly publication fees, underscore broader systemic disparities in accessing scholarly publications, especially in resource-limited academic settings (Dusdal and Powell, 2021). The pressures of time and coordination challenges align with previous findings that collaboration introduces logistical complexities, necessitating clear communication and role negotiation (Oliver et al., 2018). Additionally, concerns about the unpredictability of peer review and editorial changes emphasize structural uncertainties that extend beyond individual research teams, reflecting critiques of an evolving academic publishing landscape (Brewis, 2018; Thompson et al. 2022). These challenges underscore the importance of transparent authorship practices, supportive institutional policies, and effective leadership to sustain equitable and productive collaborations (Patel et al., 2021; Zreik et al., 2022).

Contribution to Research on Co-Authorship

By focusing on co-authors' lived experiences, this study addresses a notable gap in the literature that has traditionally prioritized lead authorship, productivity metrics, and bibliometric analyses (Brewis, 2018; Thompson et al., 2022). The findings demonstrate that co-authors' motivations and experiences are complex,

relational, and shaped by both personal values and institutional structures. This qualitative perspective contributes to a nuanced understanding of academic publishing and collaboration, offering insights that can inform policies and practices aimed at fostering ethical, inclusive, and sustainable research partnerships.

5. DISCUSSION

This study explored the motivations and experiences of academic co-authors in the realms of scholarly publishing and research collaboration, emphasizing how these activities are influenced by professional identity, motivational frameworks, collaborative practices and systemic limitations. The study's findings indicate that academic publishing transcends being a mere technical obligation, representing a deeply ingrained professional and social practice within higher education. Consistent with previous studies, participants regarded academic publishing as a fundamental aspect of their professional identity and scholarly duties. Publishing functions to disseminate knowledge, establish credibility, and fulfill institutional and societal roles. This aligns with the literature that underscores publishing as central to academic legitimacy, accountability and institutional reputation (Craig, 2020; Rokhmani et al., 2019; Vecaldo et al., 2019). These findings further bolster the argument that publishing aids identity formation by positioning academics as credible contributors to scholarly communities (Kotera et al., 2021).

The results also highlight that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for publishing coexist rather than operate independently. Participants' passion for learning, curiosity, and desire to contribute to knowledge were intertwined with external pressures such as promotion requirements and institutional incentives. This is consistent with earlier studies showing that academic publishing is driven by a complex motivational ecology in which internal satisfaction and external rewards mutually reinforce researchers' engagement (Drosou et al., 2019; D' Souza et al., 2018; Peng & Gao, 2019). The presence of blended motivations suggests that institutional evaluation systems strongly shape scholarly behavior while allowing for meaningful intellectual engagement. Collaboration has emerged as a strategic response to the intellectual and practical demands of academic publishing in recent years. Participants described co-authorship as enabling knowledge sharing, complementary expertise, mentorship and increased productivity. These findings corroborate the evidence that collaborative research enhances quality, innovation, and impact through collective expertise and distributed labor (Di Bella et al., 2021; Kwiek, 2020). The emphasis on mentorship and professional growth further supports research highlighting collaboration as a formative learning space for researchers across career stages (Bredella et al. 2019; Bukusi et al. 2018).

Despite its benefits, collaboration was also marked by tensions related to financial constraints, time management, communication, and structural uncertainties in the publication process. High publication costs and unpredictable peer-review systems reflect broader inequities and instabilities in the academic publishing

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landscape (Brewis, 2018; Dusdal & Powell, 2021). These challenges echo prior findings that collaboration requires deliberate coordination, transparent authorship practices and effective leadership to mitigate conflicts and ensure equitable participation (Oliver et al., 2018; Patel et al., 2021; Zreik et al., 2022). By focusing on co-authors' lived experiences, this study addresses a significant gap in the literature, which has often prioritized productivity metrics and lead authorship perspectives (Thompson et al., 2022). These findings contribute to a nuanced qualitative understanding of how motivations, benefits, and challenges intersect in collaborative academic publishing.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The findings extend existing models of academic publishing by demonstrating that co-authorship is shaped by overlapping motivational, relational, and institutional forces. This study supports frameworks that conceptualize publishing as both an identity-forming and structurally regulated practice, emphasizing the need to integrate motivational theory with sociological perspectives on collaboration.

Practical Implications

For academic institutions, the findings underscore the importance of creating supportive research environments that balance performance-based incentives with intrinsic scholarly values. Clear authorship guidelines, mentorship structures, and collaborative support systems may help sustain productive and ethical research collaborations. Additionally, addressing financial barriers to publishing can promote more equitable participation in scholarly dissemination.

Policy Implications

At the policy level, institutions and funding bodies should consider revisiting promotion and evaluation systems to explicitly recognize such collaborative contributions. Policies that value mentorship, teamwork, and shared authorship alongside publication counts can foster healthier research cultures and reduce the undue pressure associated with "publish or perish" environments for researchers.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by its relatively small sample size and its focus on co-authors who had prior collaborative relationships with the researcher, which may have influenced the participants' perspectives. While this study prioritized qualitative depth and rich contextual

understanding over statistical generalizability, future research may expand to include participants from diverse institutions, disciplines, and collaborative contexts to enhance the transferability of the findings.

6. CONCLUSION

This qualitative research emphasizes the strong connection between academic publishing and research collaboration, both of which are influenced by factors such as professional identity, motivation, collaborative learning, and structural limitations. Co-authors perceive publishing as a significant scholarly duty and institutional requirement, while collaboration serves as an essential approach to learning, enhancing productivity, and fostering professional development. Simultaneously, financial, temporal, and systemic obstacles continue to affect collaborative experiences. By focusing on the perspectives of co-authors, this study offers a more inclusive and detailed understanding of scholarly publishing, shifting the focus from productivity metrics to the actual experiences of academic collaboration. These findings highlight the importance of supportive institutional policies, ethical authorship practices, and balanced evaluation systems for promoting sustainable and equitable research partnerships in higher education.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that higher education institutions strengthen research support systems that recognize and sustain collaborative scholarly work. Institutions should establish clear authorship and collaboration guidelines, provide mentoring structures for early career researchers, and offer financial or logistical assistance to mitigate publication costs, which often hinder research productivity. Academic leaders and research managers are encouraged to foster collaborative research cultures by valuing team-based outputs alongside individual achievements in promotion and evaluation. Furthermore, professional development initiatives focusing on research skills, ethical authorship, communication, and time management may enhance the effectiveness of co-authorship. For future research, qualitative and longitudinal studies across diverse institutional and disciplinary contexts are recommended to further examine how motivation, collaboration experiences, and challenges evolve throughout academic careers, thereby informing more equitable and sustainable research policies and practices.

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