

Publishing for easy credits: An Indonesian case

The pressure to publish is a familiar sensation for most academics, but it weighs heavier on some than on others. Knowledge of a particular language, for example, will often mean the difference between being able to publish for an international audience or not. Here I comment on the Indonesian case, as an example of the lengths gone to for career advancement. With the pressure high and the predatory publishers on the lure, scholars' choices are often understandable, but standards of quality control must be improved if the reputations of academics, and the scientific world of research, are to be protected.

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Publishing requirements for promotion

Indonesian universities have a four-tier academic ranking system: Asisten Ahli (tutor), Lektor (lecturer), Lektor Kepala (senior lecturer) and Guru Besar (professor).¹ Each tier (jabatan) is further divided into two steps (golongan), except for Lektor Kepala, which has three steps. The procedure for promotion to the next step or tier is regulated by the Directorate General of Higher Education (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi [Dikti]), and follows a credit point system (Sistem Penilaian Angka Kredit Dosen). Publications, and especially articles in international journals, weigh heavily in the credit point system.²

Besides regular promotion (kenaikan jabatan), an accelerated promotion (loncat jabatan) is also available for the 250,000 sub-professorial academic staff members (dosen) at Indonesian universities—only 10% of all academic staff members are professors. Promotion is granted based on merits in teaching and education, service to the community, and research and publications. One of the requirements for advancement from the rank of Lektor to Lektor Kepala is that the applicant has published an article in either an accredited national journal or in an international journal. If, however, the instructor who applies for promotion to the rank of Lektor Kepala is not a holder of a doctorate, then the applicant must have published at least one article as the principal author in a reputable international journal. Promotion from Lektor Kepala to the rank of Guru Besar requires a doctorate and at least one publication in a reputable international journal. The requirements are tougher for those who opt for accelerated promotion. Promotion from lectureship to professorship requires four articles in reputable international journals.

According to Dikti, an 'international journal' must have an ISSN, an online presence, an editorial board with members from at least four countries, and it must be indexed by international databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, or Microsoft Academic Search. Dikti furthermore stipulates that the article must be written in one of the six official languages of the United Nations (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish)—notably, not a native Indonesian language such as Bahasa. 'Reputable' international journals also need to have an ISI Web of Science (Thomson Reuters) impact factor or a Scimago Journal Rank (SJR).

Potential, possible, or probable predatory publishers

The no-fee open access model with free downloads of scholarly articles has a number of advantages – the most obvious being the free accessibility of scholarly articles. In order to finance themselves, however, publishers either need a sponsor such as a university, or they must charge the authors. A study conducted in 2013 found that among the 9000 open access journals listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), only 28% charged a publication fee. Among humanities journals, only 4% required payment by authors.³ Yet, many authors – the vast majority of

them from developing countries, but also from Russia and other former Soviet republics – choose journals that do indeed charge fees. The reason is that a large percentage of fee-charging journals accept articles with little or no scrutiny.

In 2013, John Bohannon, as an experiment, submitted 304 versions of a fatally flawed 'wonder drug' paper to open access journals.⁴ 121 papers were submitted to journals listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals. The DOAJ lists quality open access, peer-reviewed journals. 167 papers were submitted to journals listed in the Beall's List of 'potential, possible, or probable predatory scholarly open access publishers'.⁵ By the time Bohannon published his article on the outcomes of his experiment, 157 of the journals had accepted the bogus scientific paper and 98 had rejected it. 60% of the final decisions had been made without a peer-review process. Of the 106 journals that had actually reviewed the paper, 70% accepted the bogus paper. The acceptance rate was, with 82%, much higher among the journals on Beall's List, but a surprisingly high number of DOAJ publishers (45%) also accepted Bohannon's 'spoof' article, despite the fact that it was significantly scientifically flawed.

Predatory journals have mushroomed since 2010 and this has created, in Bohannon's words, "an emerging Wild West in academic publishing." The 2015 Beall's List of predatory open access publishers contains 693 publishers—an increase of 241 since 2014. Furthermore, the publishers on the list have portfolios that ranges from just a few, to hundreds of individual journal titles. Dikti is well aware of this issue and has started to develop its own blacklist, but hitherto it only contains three entries!⁶ Dikti's advice is both outdated and insufficient, and its guidelines as to what constitutes an 'international reputable journal' are inadequate.

Exposing a predator

One journal that fulfils all of Dikti's requirements for a 'reputable international journal', is the *Journal of Language and Literature* published by the Progress Publishing Company in Baku (Azerbaijan). *The Journal of Language and Literature*, and also the other five journals published by the Progress Publishing Company, became increasingly popular among Indonesian scholars. Hundreds of articles were published by Indonesian scholars, especially from smaller and less prestigious universities. In the February 2015 edition of the journal, every fourth article originated from Indonesia. The Progress Publishing Company became a convenient venue to accumulate easy and, with just a US\$290 fee, relatively inexpensive credits for tenure and promotion.

In mid-2014 I exposed the Progress Publishing Company as a predatory publisher, which was deceiving researchers by pretending to be a legitimate journal.⁷ Despite positive Scopus and Scimago Journal Rank indicators, the submissions were often of poor quality, and there was no evidence of even basic editing. The names (and addresses) of the members of the editorial boards of the various journals had been taken from the Internet without the knowledge of the alleged board members. The 'board members' demanded that their names be deleted from the site, and the editor-in-chief resigned. A few weeks later the website of the Progress Publishing Company disappeared for good. Unfortunately, as the enterprise was an online money making scheme, not a single article had ever been printed. And so, with the dissolution of the company, several thousand articles, submitted mainly by young researchers from developing countries, also disappeared.

The following describes the case of just one of many hundred articles submitted by Indonesian researchers with the apparent goal to gain easy credit points for promotion. In 2014, a group of researchers from Diponegoro University submitted an article with the title "Identification of lifestyle adaptation due to aircraft noise in Ahmad Yani International Airport and surrounding" to the *Science Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* published by Science Journal Publication [sic].⁸ After paying the publishing fee of US\$500 the article was accepted for publication.

The *Science Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* prides itself for its "quality, reputation and high standard of peer review." The "fast and unbiased [...] double-blinded peer review process" is said to "ensure professional and fair review" of submitted manuscripts. Submitting a paper to the journal

is made easy: "Generally peer review is complete [sic] within 1-2 weeks and the editor's decision within 24 hours of this." This is the abstract of the article as published by this assumingly trustworthy publisher. All typographic mistakes are the authors':

Noise is one of the most common items used by aircraft around the world, there are About 50,000 commercial flights each day around the world and 3 million people traveling. In the operational of aviation in Ahmad Yani International Airport Semarang, an airplane can make some noise. The noise is a sound that unwanted in a place and time scale, it can make some disturbance that influence human freshness and health. Particularly for Residents whom living very close by the airport such as Graha Padma and Tambakharjo.

The authors frequently omit spaces between words and violate rules of punctuation either by putting a space before a punctuation mark or by not putting a space after a punctuation mark. Note that the numeral '2' in the following quote is not a footnote mark.

By that definition, the sound emanating from jet aircraft is considered noise to most people.² The real estate professional needs to assess the market's perceptions towards airport noise, knowing that those perceptions are then translated into sales prices when the properties are sold and other indications of market values.

Poor English does not necessarily mean that an article is of low quality, but a combination of poor English and poor quality, as in this article, is unfortunately not uncommon, especially in predatory journals.

This example, and the case of the *Journal of Language and Literature*, shows that a journal with a SJR ranking is not necessarily a reputable journal. And as Bohannon's experiment has shown, there is no clear line separating 'good' from 'bad' journals (even DOAJ listed journals accepted his phoney article). After Bohannon's revelation, DOAJ tightened its inclusion standards, but as long as the Wild West dominates fee-based open access publishing, and as long as Indonesian universities do not apply tougher standards of quality control, it may be difficult to constrain the flood of low quality articles published in questionable journals.

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References

- Lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor in US terminology.
- Writing a high school textbook merits 5 credits, a monograph is worth 20 credits, an article in an accredited national journal receives 25 credits. An article published in an international journal indexed by a reputable international database (such as Web of Science, Scopus, or Microsoft Academic Search) gets 30 credits, or even 40 if the journal has an impact factor: a measure reflecting the average number of times an article published in that journal has been cited.
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- Bohannon, J. 2013. 'Who's Afraid of Peer Review?', *Science* 342: 60-65, <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/342/6154/60.full.pdf>
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- <http://jipll.manoa.hawaii.edu/internal/documents/predatory-publishers/>
- <http://www.sjpub.org>. A shorter version of the article was published in the same year—in English but with an Indonesian title—in *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Biologi* 11 (1), Program Studi Pendidikan Biologi FKIP Universitas Sebelas Maret. <http://jurnal.fkip.uns.ac.id/index.php/prosbio/article/view/4888>