

Publishing a research paper in reputable journals: doctoral students' perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to enquire about the English foreign language (EFL) doctoral students' perspective, especially in the non-English department, concerning the Indonesian government policy, which obliges an article published in a reputable international journal as a requirement to receive a doctoral degree. Their challenges in publishing their papers in Scopus or Web of Science (WOS)-indexed journals and their resolutions were also analyzed. A mixed-methods technique was used to obtain quantitative and qualitative information. The study consisted of 57 respondents, comprising 25 males and 32 females, who were EFL doctoral students of education departments from five universities. The purposive sampling method with several criteria was used to determine the study participants. Data were then collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Subsequently, the findings showed that the policy of publishing a paper in Scopus or WOS-indexed journals to obtain an EFL doctoral degree was burdensome to the majority of the students. Other findings showed that the students faced several challenges in publishing their papers in these journals, including language problems, cost of publication, journal selection, lack of experience, duration to publish, writing difficulties, revising, and stress. The actions to resolve these challenges were also provided in this study.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, articles published in Scopus and Web of Science (WOS)-indexed journals have become a source of pride worldwide. This will lead to positive effects, such as popularity in the publishing sphere, an increase in their institution's standing, as well as an improved reputation in the academic environment [1]–[4]. This activity has been a requirement for doctoral candidates to obtain their degrees in some American, European, Australian, and Asian countries [4]–[11].

In Indonesia, the publication policy as a requirement for the graduation of doctoral students was released in 2019 following the Director General of Higher Education circular letter [12], [13]. It was an attempt to improve the quality of doctoral candidates, maintain the credibility of the campus responsible for their education, and increase their academic career opportunities. However, the policy created new problems, particularly for students who had to adopt English as an additional language (EAL) or English foreign language (EFL). Studies have reported that many EAL or EFL students face problems in writing study articles, including difficulty in grammar accuracy, mechanics, vocabulary appropriateness, idea organization, and argumentation

structuring [14]–[16]. Their limited English abilities also augment their difficulty in publishing articles using the language [16]–[19]. For some students who used English as a native or second language, the issue was difficulties in academic writing, indicating that the activity was still tricky for first and second-language users [8], [9]. Also, the relative novelty of the policy left some universities lacking qualified facilities for accessing articles, as well as a suitable environment and supervisors experienced in publishing articles in Scopus and WOS-indexed journals. The idea of publishing articles in leading journals as a prerequisite for the doctoral degree was considered unreasonable [8] and led to negative effects, such as delayed graduation of students and increased cost and stress [20]–[22]. In addition, it was a long process and was capable of suppressing student psychology [7], [8], [22], [23].

Publishing a paper in reputable, internationally acclaimed Scopus or WOS-indexed journals is an advantage as well as a challenge, as evidenced by previous studies [24]–[27]. Lages *et al.* [28] investigated the difficulties of Middle East and African students in publishing their papers in high-impact journals. They revealed four challenges, namely processing the validity and reliability of the data, generalizing the research results, and the editors' and reviewers' lack of interest in the regions. Duracinsky *et al.* [29] highlighted the lack of time to prepare a good article, limited English and academic writing skills, and difficulty writing as the challenges faced by French scholars in publishing their papers in high-impact-factor journals. In addition, Lyytinen *et al.* [30] reviewed European publishing in high-impact journals. They found seven barriers for Europeans to publish their articles, namely: i) the lack of appreciation of the article genre; ii) weak publishing cultures; iii) inadequate Ph.D. preparation for publishing; iv) weak reviewing practices; v) poor command of research methods; vi) poor understanding of the reviewing protocols; and vii) institutional shaping of funding. Furthermore, Okoduwa *et al.* [31] noted that a writing experience, high publishing cost, and long waiting period for the peer-reviewed process are the challenges encountered by Nigerian researchers and teaching staff. A study by Li [8] reported that publishing articles in reputable international journals was an issue for doctoral students as well as supervisors. The pressure experienced by these groups put them in a dilemma that engendered plans to rebel against policies that were perceived as unreasonable.

The findings revealed that doctoral students from different countries have faced various challenges in publishing their papers in high-impact journals. However, these issues have been given little attention in the Indonesian context, where doctoral students have been obligated to publish their articles in high-impact Scopus or WOS-indexed journals as a part of graduation requirements. Moreover, as non-native English speakers, these EFL doctoral students experience difficulty publishing their studies in Scopus-indexed journals because the articles must be in English [30]–[32]. The publication policy was set by the government without considering the readiness of universities and students, who are essentially responsible for the publications [33]. This necessitates a better understanding of the existing obstacles in order to design effective solutions [34].

Therefore, this study attempted to enquire about the EFL doctoral students' perspective, particularly in the non-English department, about the Indonesian government's policy, which obliges an article published in a reputable international journal as a requirement for awarding their degrees. The challenges encountered in publishing research papers in Scopus or WOS-indexed journals and the solutions were also analyzed. This study provided significant insights for the policymakers (government) and the policy users (academicians) in implementing the policy concerning the requirement of a Scopus or WOS-indexed journal publication to receive a doctoral degree. The outcomes of this study are further considered important because they may be a solution for doctoral students or other professionals facing these challenges. The research question of this study is formulated as: i) what are the EFL doctoral students' perceptions of publishing research articles in Scopus and WOS-indexed journals as a requirement of graduation; ii) what are the EFL doctoral students' challenges in publishing their articles in Scopus and WOS-indexed journals; and iii) how do the EFL doctoral students deal with the challenges of publishing their research articles in Scopus and WOS-indexed journals.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

A mixed-methods technique was used to obtain quantitative and qualitative data. The respondents comprised 57 EFL doctoral students, specifically 25 males and 32 females, of education departments from five universities. Purposive sampling with several criteria was used to determine the participants. Their ages ranged from 34 to 50 years old, and their experiences in publishing their papers in Scopus and WOS were classified. All had participated three times in training on article writing, involving seminars and workshops. The participants' backgrounds are explained in Table 1.

The data collection instruments used in this study were questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires were distributed to 57 EFL doctoral students via Google Forms to obtain information about their perceptions of the publishing articles in Scopus-indexed journals as a graduation requirement. The questionnaires consisted of five closed-ended questions to obtain the participants' perspectives on the implementation of this policy. Permission was obtained before distributing the questionnaires by delivering

letters and agreements to all participants based on the ethics of conducting research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 potential participants, involving nine males and females each, who represented the questionnaires. This resulted in two sides, one supporting and the other rejecting the policy.

The interviews were divided into two categories, namely the challenges encountered while publishing papers in the Scopus and WOS-indexed journals and the solutions. Considering anonymity and confidentiality, the participants' names and affiliations were expressed as pseudonyms. The validity and reliability tests of the instruments were performed by three academic writing experts with experience in publishing in Scopus or WOS-indexed journals. A pilot study was also conducted with 19 EFL post-graduate students to validate the questionnaires, and the result was tested through the Cronbach alpha calculation. The Cronbach's alpha value obtained was 0.955, which is higher than 0.6, indicating that the questionnaires were reliable. The feedback and suggestions from the experts and the pilot study were used to improve the instruments, particularly the content validity of the questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews. Finally, the instruments were discussed to ensure their validity, which was subsequently confirmed.

Table 1. The participants' background

Age	Gender		Participating in seminars/workshop	Experience in publishing a research paper in Scopus/WOS
	Male	Female		
35-40	12	15	27	5
40-45	7	12	19	3
45-50	6	5	11	2
Total	25	32	57	10

The quantitative data were obtained from the questionnaires, analyzed by Microsoft Excel 2013, and presented in percentage form. The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were evaluated using thematic analysis. Generally, thematic analysis is used to identify, analyze and report the themes of the qualitative data [35]. It engaged five phases, namely initial coding, theme searching, reviewing, defining and naming, and result reporting [36], [37].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. English foreign language doctoral students' perceptions

The researchers distributed the questionnaires to the participants to answer the first research question. It was used to capture the EFL doctoral students' perceptions of publishing research articles in Scopus and WOS-indexed journals as a requirement of graduation. The result of the questionnaires is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The result of the EFL doctoral students' perceptions

No	Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	A publication in Scopus or WOS Indexed journals is a requirement to obtain a doctoral degree.	3%	14%	14%	67%
2	A publication in Scopus or WOS Indexed journals hinders you from finishing your study on time.	79%	5%	11%	5%
3	A publication in Scopus or WOS Indexed journals stresses you out.	81%	3%	13%	3%
4	A publication in Scopus or WOS Indexed journals provides a positive effect on you as a doctoral student.	21%	26%	51%	2%
5	You are ready to implement the policy.	3%	16%	11%	70%

Table 2 shows that the EFL doctoral students had positive and negative perceptions of the policy. The majority of 67% disagreed with the question that a publication in Scopus or WOS-indexed journals was a requirement to obtain a doctoral degree. Approximately 84% each agreed that the policy was a hindrance to finishing their study on time and caused stress. About 81% were not ready to implement the policy, and 45% of respondents thought that it had a positive effect on their careers, though the majority disagreed.

The findings showed that most EFL doctoral students considered the policy of publication in Scopus or WOS-indexed journals as a requirement to obtain a doctoral degree as burdensome. The majority agreed that the requirement hindered their graduation and impacted their psychology. Also, they were still unprepared to implement the policy and considered it an issue. The logical reason for these findings was the lack of preparation and communication between the government as a policymaker and the academicians as "victims of the policy," leading to numerous problems. These findings align with the previous study, which stated that the implementation of publication as a requirement to obtain a degree inhibited students from graduating at the appointed time [38]. This finding also supported previous studies regarding the effect of this mandate on students' psychology [8], [21].

3.2. English foreign language doctoral students' challenges and actions

The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews to answer the second and third research questions. Semi-structured interviews were done to obtain information; specifically, the challenges faced in publishing an article in Scopus or WOS-indexed journals and the solutions employed. The result of semi-structured interviews was presented in the following description.

3.2.1. Language problems

The excerpts indicate that language issues contributed to the participants' challenges in publishing their papers. Difficulties were naturally encountered by the EFL learners because the frequency of English used in daily communication was a little. This was supported by participant P17's statement, *"Translating my paper into English is an annoying thing for me,"* illustrating that language was an obstacle.

"The most severe difficulty for me in writing an article for publication in Scopus indexed journals is language. We have to write twice, in Indonesian first, and then translate into English." (P2)

"I do not have an English background, so it is difficult for me to write in English." (P10)

"I use Google translate, Bing Translator, or Spinner.ID to assist me in translating from Indonesian to English." (P2)

"I use the services of a paid translator to make it easier to translate my articles." (P10)

"I use the translate facility in MS Word to translate my research paper. I also use proofreader services to improve the quality of language before submitting my paper." (P17)

The responses demonstrate the actions taken to solve the language problem, which includes utilizing several translator tools, e.g., Google Translate, Bing Translator, Spinner.ID, and MS Word translator, alongside the use of translator and proofreader services. Participant 2 utilized the technology, and participant 10 used the translator services to solve the language issues. Whereas participant 17 combined the technology and proofreader services.

3.2.2. Cost of publication

Most of the participants mentioned that the publication cost was a deterrent to publishing their papers in leading journals. Since many high-impact journals apply publication charges, the majority try to submit their paper to free journals. They also search for journals with low costs or proposed funding from their campus or government.

"The high cost of publishing articles in the Scopus and WOS-indexed journals is a heavy burden for me." (P1)

"The article processing charge (APC) is too expensive for me." (P5)

"I think the biggest hindrance in publishing a research paper is the publication cost." (P12)

"I am trying to publish my articles in unpaid (free) journals." (P1)

"Trying to find an unpaid journal with a fast waiting period. If I don't get it, I will look for paid journals that are not too expensive with APC between 100-300 USD." (P5)

"Trying to meet the cost of publication in the journal by applying for funding to the campus or government. If the college rejects the application, I will have to look for additional income to pay." (P12)

3.2.3. Journal choices

The abundance of predatory hijacked and discontinued journals was an encumbrance in seeking safe and reputable journals. As a result, they had to consult their supervisors or colleagues who had published their papers in good journals. The supervisors' or colleagues' experiences in publication became essential considerable to avoid hijacked and discontinued journals.

"The number of predatory hijacked and discontinued journals adds to the difficulty of publishing my papers in Scopus and WOS-indexed journals." (P4)

"Consulting my colleagues and supervisors who have experience in publishing research articles in safe leading journals." (P4)

3.2.4. Lack of experience

Participants 7 and 11 emphasized the need for more experience in publishing research papers in Scopus journals. They joined seminars, workshops, and training programs to attain more experience and

information about how to publish a paper in Scopus or WOS journals. However, participant 11 shockingly revealed using an article writing service provider in constructing research papers.

"I have no experience in publishing scientific articles in Scopus and WOS-indexed journals. Publishing a scientific article in a Sinta journal, which is indexed in Indonesia, is challenging for me. You can imagine how difficult it is to publish my paper in Scopus journals." (P7)

"Scopus or WOS-indexed journals are new to me. I do not know how to start the process." (P11)

"I may join a seminar, workshop, or training program on publishing a research article in the Scopus/WOS-indexed journals." (P7)

"If I am in an urgent situation, I think I will use an article writing service provider." (P11)

3.2.5. Publication time

Participants 3 and 14 agreed that publication required a long time, with six months to two years as the average. The long period process hindered them from publishing their research papers. In order to get shorter publication times, they chose paid journals with a fast track or provided acceleration programs.

"Publishing a paper in a Scopus journal takes a long time. The fastest period is six months with several requirements." (P3)

"Journals that are free on average have a long publication process of about six months to two years." (P14)

".... So I was forced to find a paid journal with a faster review process." (P3)

"Following the program to accelerate the publication process offered by the journal even though I had to pay an additional fee." (P14)

3.2.6. Writing issues

Several writing issues were hindrances for the participants in writing their papers, such as coherence, novelty, paraphrasing, references, plagiarism, and grammar. Some activities, such as joining seminars, workshops, and training programs, benefited the participants in tackling those problems. The use of paraphrasing tools, plagiarism checker, and Grammarly also assisted them in dealing with writing issues.

"Writing coherent paragraphs, finding novelty, paraphrasing, and incorporating criticism supported by theory were challenges for me in writing scientific articles." (P6)

"The search for references, building novelty, writing references, and the coherence of the article are things I must learn in order to make up for my shortcomings in writing quality articles." (P8)

"Overcoming plagiarism and grammatical errors are quite difficult for me in the process of finishing my articles for publication." (P15)

"I joined a training program on writing potential Scopus publications, which provided much information to improve my academic writing." (P6)

"Attending seminars and workshops on writing scientific papers for publication in Scopus or WOS gave more insights to improving my writing problems." (P8)

"The use of paraphrasing tools, plagiarism checkers, and Grammarly facilitate me to handle those issues." (P15)

3.2.7. Revising

A revision was necessary for papers submitted for publication. Suggestions from the reviewers or editors were used to improve the articles to enable their prompt publication. The use of article repair services helped the participants with their issues, though the action violated research ethics.

"The request for revising my research paper from the reviewers posed a tough challenge for me. I utilize a paid service to revise my research paper. Although expensive, it was worth the cost." (P9)

3.2.8. Stress

The extracts showed that article rejection decreased the participants' motivation, caused stress, and depleted their interest in revising for submission to another journal. Specific actions were required to manage these issues. Discussing their rejection experience with close colleagues and watching motivational movies became alternative ways to address those problems.

“... rejection status of my article makes me stressed.” (P13)

“After hearing that my paper was rejected, I lost my motivation to revise and submit to another journal.” (P18)

“To decrease my stress, I share and discuss my rejection with my close colleagues.” (P13)

“Watching a motivational movie and joining an article writing community helped return my motivation to revise my research paper.” (P18)

The findings revealed that EFL doctoral students face several challenges in publishing their papers in Scopus or WOS-indexed journals, including language problems, costs of publication, journal choices, lack of experience, publication time, writing issues, revising, and stress. These findings can be divided into two categories, before and after submission. Language problems, journal choices, lack of experience, and writing issues are generally experienced before submitting the paper to the targeted journals, while high publication cost, long duration, revising, and stress are challenges experienced after. All the mentioned challenges correspond with previous studies [28], [30], [31], which are a result of poor preparation on the part of policymakers and policy users. The hasty policy implementation without considering the readiness of policy users was considered the main cause of the emergence of these problems.

Also, this study found various actions to address the challenges experienced by EFL doctoral students. Utilizing translator tools and proofreader services was their solution to language problems, and seeking free or low-cost journals was a way to deal with publication cost issues. In addition, consulting their supervisors or colleagues assisted in overcoming the problem of journal choice, and the publication duration issue was tackled using paid journals with fast-track tools or acceleration programs. Some applications, such as paraphrasing tools, plagiarism checkers, and Grammarly, as well as seminars, workshops, and training programs, were employed to handle the writing issues. Sharing with close colleagues about their rejection experiences and watching motivational movies helped reduce their stress, while article repair services were used to address the difficulty in revising their research papers. Finally, the lack of experience challenge was resolved by joining seminars, workshops, or training programs and using article writing service providers.

From all actions, the use of article writing service providers and repair services are considered illegal actions and violations of research ethics. The possible reason for those actions was the difficulty of submitting a paper to Scopus and WOS-indexed journals within a short time. Publishing a research paper in those journals requires a long duration and highly complex processes, leading to the patronage of article writing service providers and repair services. This indicates that the unpreparedness of the “policy victims” initiated various problems that were addressed by taking multiple measures. The lack of preparation in executing the policy resulted in demands and pressure to pass graduate on time, causing the students to engage in legal as well as illegal actions.

Consequently, the government, as the policymaker, was recommended to consider several aspects from the viewpoints of academicians as the policy users, such as readiness, qualification, facility, publication process, cost, and time consumption, before establishing the policy. It must also consider the students’ psychology and other issues outside of the publication process, as well as provide training programs to improve the policy users’ abilities. This will ensure actions that are illegal or violate the research ethics are avoided.

4. CONCLUSION

This study described the Indonesian EFL doctoral students’ experiences in publishing their research papers in Scopus or WOS-indexed journals. The findings revealed that the majority disagreed with the government policy, which obligated doctoral candidates to publish their papers in Scopus or WOS-indexed journals in order to obtain their degree. Various negative actions emerged due to the policy, such as the use of article writing service providers and repair services. Students face various challenges in writing research papers for publication, including language problems, cost of publication, journal choices, lack of experience, publication time, writing issues, revising, and stress. Hence, they implement several actions as solutions, such as the use of supporting tools, low-cost or free journals, consulting their supervisors and colleagues, utilizing fast-track services or fast publication journals, and joining training programs, seminars, or workshops. Watching motivational movies and sharing their rejection experiences were also ways to remain motivated and reduce their pressures. Several suggestions for the policymaker and users were provided in this study. The recommendations for policymakers are communication with the policy users and the consideration of several aspects that influence publication in Scopus and indexed journals, such as the users’ readiness, psychology, economy, ability, experience, and facilities. Curriculum improvement, the provision of training programs, and fulfilling users’ needs to use open-access research papers and improve their English academic writing are also steps to support the policy. Meanwhile, policy users or academicians are advised to improve their ability in

academic writing and publication, alongside avoiding illegal and violent actions to publish their papers in leading journals.

This study had several limitations; first, the participants involved a small number of EFL doctoral students from the Education department of four universities. Second, this study only discussed those publishing research papers in Scopus or WOS-indexed journals. Further studies are suggested to investigate students from other departments with the same issue using a larger sample. Additionally, the perspectives of the lecturers and institutions are a necessity for future studies.




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