

The Crisis of Academic Publishing in Southeast Asia: Predatory Journals and Systemic Challenges



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Introduction

Academic publishing is like a cornerstone of knowledge production and dissemination. While more countries, including those in Southeast Asia, place increasing pressure on scientists to publish, many scholars still face systemic barriers that limit the quality and impact of their research. This challenge is especially common in countries with less-developed research environments.

Despite universities' high expectations for publication output, inadequate research support, language barriers, and an unsupportive academic ecosystem often push researchers toward predatory journals. This growing crisis not only threatens academic integrity but also hinders the advancement of science and education in the region.

The Pressure to Publish and Its Consequences

Southeast Asian countries have seen an increasing emphasis on scientific publications as a measure of faculty performance. While this aligns with global academic trends, the reality is that many universities lack not just the infrastructure but the academic ecosystem to support high-quality research. Faculty members, often overloaded with teaching responsibilities, are expected to publish regularly in high-impact journals, despite having limited access to funding, academic writing skill, mentorship, and research networks.

This intense pressure, at least, has led to two alarming trends that undermine academic integrity in Southeast Asia. One is the rise of predatory publishing, where many scholars, facing repeated rejections from reputable journals or struggling with quality concerns, turn to predatory journals. This type of journals prioritizes profit over academic rigor, offering quick and easy publication without proper peer review. As a result, low-quality or even fraudulent research makes its way into academic literature, hence weakening the credibility of research from the region.

Another concerning issue is contract cheating in research ([Hanami et al., 2023](#)), where some scholars outsource their academic writing to third-party services. This practice, which violates

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ethical standards, reflects the extreme pressure to publish at any cost. Contract cheating not only compromises the integrity of individual researchers but also damages the reputation of institutions and contributes to a culture of academic dishonesty. Without proper intervention, these trends will continue to erode the credibility and global standing of Southeast Asian research.

The Role of Predatory Journals in Southeast Asia

Predatory journals are a growing problem in Southeast Asia, threatening the quality of research and education. These journals often bypass proper peer review, allowing low-quality or even misleading studies to be published without rigorous scrutiny. Usually, predatory journals also charge high fees to researchers while providing little to no editorial oversight, making publication more about money than academic merit.

This issue not only harms individual scholars but also damages the reputation of universities, as being associated with such journals can undermine their credibility. A survey conducted by [Aini and colleges](#) of Indonesian professors found that 8 out of 10 have published in predatory or questionable journals, showing how widespread the problem has become. The absence of clear guidelines and strict oversight makes it even easier for these journals to thrive.

If this trend continues, it could create a cycle of misinformation—where flawed research spreads, weakens scientific progress, and lowers the overall quality of education. To protect academic integrity, universities and also policymakers must take action to help researchers identify and avoid predatory journals, ensuring that quality, not just quantity, remains the priority in academic publishing.

Flawed Research and Its Academic Consequences

Beyond the issue of predatory journals, many papers published in, so-called, “legitimate” but low-quality journals suffer from serious methodological flaws. The following examples from Indonesia and the Philippines illustrate these concerns. However, it is important to note that this issue is not limited to these two countries; it is a common challenge in nations with weak research traditions ([Ruiz, 2012](#)).

One major concern is the misuse of research methods. For example, papers from [medical](#) and [sports](#) science studies in Indonesia employed pre-post experimental designs but failed to apply the appropriate statistical analysis techniques. Instead of using more suitable methods like mixed-design ANOVA, the researchers relied on simplistic t-tests, making it impossible to draw meaningful comparisons or reliable conclusions.

Another issue is poor journal selection, where research is published in journals unrelated to its subject matter. A striking example is a [psychology paper](#) on Islamic teachings and mental health that was published in a fisheries journal—a clear sign of weak editorial oversight and low publication standards.

Furthermore, many studies found to have weak theoretical foundations, whereas some researchers fail to properly justify their theoretical framework. For instance, an adaptation of a

[psychological scale](#) to the Filipino context claimed to be based on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, but the study did not adequately explain why this theory was relevant to the research.

These challenges point to a larger issue: many researchers lack adequate training in research methodology, theoretical perspective, journal selection, and academic writing. Without intervention, flawed research practices will continue to undermine the credibility of Southeast Asian academia on the global stage. To improve research quality, universities and policymakers must strengthen research training, enforce stricter publication standards, and encourage scholars to publish in reputable journals that uphold rigorous peer review processes.

Can Academic Workshops Solve This?

Academic workshops have been widely promoted as a solution to improve research quality. However, based on my experience, academic workshops rarely lead to significant improvements. Many faculty members return to their usual workloads after workshops, and unable to implement new research strategies due to lack of institutional support.

In my opinion, workshops alone are not enough to improve research quality. A more structured and long-term approach is needed to create sustainable academic development. One key solution is intensive mentorship programs, where experienced scholars guide young researchers over an extended period, providing them with ongoing support and training. Another strategy is the establishment of remote research labs in underrepresented countries, which can serve as hubs for continuous training, feedback, and collaboration opportunities. Additionally, it is also suggested for universities to provide stronger journal selection guidance, actively training faculty on how to identify predatory journals and ensuring that research meets global academic standards.

Reforming Academic Publishing in Southeast Asia

From my perspective, to address the academic publishing crisis, universities and policymakers must shift their focus from quantity to quality. Instead of pressuring all faculty members to publish, institutions should prioritize research mentorship by identifying promising researchers and providing them with targeted resources, funding, and expert guidance.

Developing stronger research ethics policies is also essential. Universities must actively monitor and prevent predatory publishing practices, discourage contract cheating, and establish clear consequences for academic misconduct. To ensure higher publication standards, institutions are strongly encouraged to implement pre-submission peer review systems, where trusted experts assess research papers before they are submitted to scientific journals.

Finally, it is crucial to discourage researchers from publishing in predatory, questionable, paid journals. Instead, they should be encouraged to publish in reputable, no-fee, open-access journals that uphold rigorous peer review rather than in exploitative predatory journals that prioritize profit over quality. By implementing these reforms, Southeast Asian academia can enhance its global credibility and strengthen research integrity.

Conclusion

The academic publishing crisis in Southeast Asia is deeply rooted in systemic challenges, including high publication pressure, lack of research support, and the growing influence of predatory journals. Without urgent intervention, these issues will erode the academic credibility and hinder scientific progress.

In my opinion, by shifting from a quantity-driven approach to a quality-focused research culture, investing in mentorship, and implementing stronger research ethics, Southeast Asia can break free from the cycle of low-quality publications and establish itself as a leader in global academia.

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