



From Assumption to Evidence: A Needs-Based Design for International Publication Mentoring

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Abstract

Publication in reputable international journals is a principal criterion for evaluating lecturers' academic performance at Indonesian universities. This study maps the readiness, obstacles, and expectations of lecturers at a faculty of social and political sciences regarding a proposed workshop and mentoring program for international publication, using the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP), Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Yogyakarta, as an empirical case. Using a descriptive quantitative approach, data were collected via an online questionnaire completed by 29 lecturers and analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic categorization of open-ended responses. Most respondents were actively engaged in research (93.1%) and had already set a target for international publication (96.6%), yet publication output over the past three years remained concentrated at one to two articles (55.2%). The most pressing obstacles were the Article Processing Charge (APC, mean score 3.21) and difficulty selecting a suitable target journal (3.10); understanding of predatory journals was the weakest area (2.62). The manuscript clinic was the most anticipated activity format (82.8%), with a submission-ready manuscript identified as the primary expected outcome. These results point to a need for sustained, practice-based mentoring rather than one-off training, and the resulting needs-analysis framework is offered as a model other faculties facing comparable structural constraints may adapt to their own context.

Keywords: *International publication, Reputable journals, Academic mentoring, Social science faculty, Needs analysis*

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, publishing scholarly work in reputable international journals has become a key benchmark for assessing both institutional quality and individual lecturers' performance. Universities' Key Performance Indicators (Indikator Kinerja Utama, or IKU) and the regulations governing lecturers' workload (Beban Kerja Dosen, or BKD) treat publication in Scopus- and Web of Science-indexed journals as a strategic output with direct consequences for institutional accreditation and career advancement. Even so, Indonesian social science output remains modest compared with that of the exact sciences. Earlier studies group the obstacles into three clusters: technical difficulties in writing in English, methodological challenges tied to novelty, and structural constraints such as limited APC funding and restricted access to mentors, compounded by a growing number of predatory journals that make credible outlets harder to identify (Cobey et al., 2018; Kurt, 2018).

Against this backdrop, FISIP designed a Workshop and Mentoring Program for Publishing in International Journals. Rather than making assumptions about participants' needs, the faculty first mapped prospective participants' profiles, capacities, obstacles, and expectations, so the program could be grounded in evidence rather than generic assumptions. Accordingly, this study sets out to (1) describe the academic profile and publication experience of FISIP lecturers, (2) identify the principal obstacles to international publication, and (3) map lecturers' expectations

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regarding the format of mentoring needed.

Because the data were collected from a single faculty, a natural question is whether the findings generalize beyond this case. The specific proportions reported below apply only to this sample and should not be read as representative of Indonesian social science faculties as a whole. What is transferable is the diagnostic logic behind them: comparable policy pressures through IKU and BKD, similar constraints on APC funding and mentor access, and a shared risk of predatory journals affect most social science faculties in Indonesian public universities. Accordingly, the instrument and obstacle framework used here are offered as a model that faculties with a broadly similar profile can adapt to map their own lecturers' needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

International publication is part of the broader process of scholarly communication that shapes the visibility of knowledge, cross-national collaboration, and academic recognition (Tennant et al., 2019). In developing countries, barriers are rarely linguistic alone; they are also epistemic, structural, and economic (Salager-Meyer, 2014; Lillis & Curry, 2010). Community-based interventions such as writing clinics and group mentoring appear more effective than one-shot workshops (Cargill & Burgess, 2017; Habibie & Hyland, 2019). Selecting an appropriate journal is a distinct competency requiring bibliometric literacy; errors here contribute substantially to rejection and to the risk of publishing in a predatory outlet (Frandsen, 2019). Therefore, a sound needs assessment must weigh institutional infrastructure and financial support alongside individual capacity.

International Publication as Scholarly Communication

Publication in reputable journals is best understood not as an administrative requirement but as part of scholarly communication, through which knowledge becomes visible, is peer-reviewed, and circulates across disciplinary boundaries (Tennant et al., 2019). For Indonesian universities, bibliometric indicators, especially Scopus-indexed output tracked through SINTA, are now directly tied to institutional funding, accreditation, and academic promotion (Fry et al., 2023). This policy shift has increased publication volume but has also been criticized for fostering a narrow, output-driven view of scholarship that does not, by itself, close the capacity gaps that make international publication difficult (Fry et al., 2023; Rakhmani & Siregar, 2016).

Linguistic and Rhetorical Barriers

Much research treats the difficulty of publishing internationally as, first and foremost, a matter of language. Because English functions as the de facto lingua franca of scholarly publishing, researchers writing in English as an additional language must manage disciplinary content and an unfamiliar rhetorical register simultaneously, which can slow writing and increase the likelihood of rejection on grounds of style rather than substance (Lillis & Curry, 2010). Arsyad et al. (2019) found that Indonesian lecturers' lack of confidence in their own writing, combined with the time required to prepare an English manuscript, ranked among the strongest deterrents to submission. More recent accounts, however, caution against treating language as the primary obstacle, since digital writing-support tools have made linguistic anxiety recede relative to other, more structural difficulties (Salager-Meyer, 2014).

Structural and Financial Barriers

Beyond language, structural and economic obstacles increasingly determine who gets published and where. The shift toward open access has shifted publication costs from libraries and readers to individual authors through the Article Processing Charge (APC). APCs continue to rise

and remain closely tied to a journal's perceived prestige, disadvantaging authors from less well-resourced institutions regardless of the quality of their work (Borrego, 2023). This disadvantage is especially acute outside the Global North, where the APC functions less as an incidental cost and more as a genuine barrier to participating in the international scholarly record (Cox, 2023). Within Indonesian higher education, this financial constraint compounds a research funding environment long described as heavily bureaucratic and difficult for early- and mid-career lecturers to navigate (Rakhmani & Siregar, 2016).

Predatory Journals and Journal-Selection Literacy

A further complication is the proliferation of predatory journals, outlets that solicit and publish manuscripts for a fee while circumventing peer review or performing it only nominally. Because no single, widely accepted definition of predatory publishing existed until recently, researchers new to international publishing have often struggled to distinguish credible open-access outlets from exploitative ones (Grudniewicz et al., 2019). Cobey et al. (2018) found that authors who publish in presumed predatory journals often do so under pressure to meet publication quotas rather than out of ignorance alone, suggesting the problem is sustained as much by structural incentives as by lack of awareness. Frandsen (2019) similarly concludes that journal selection is a distinct competency rarely taught during doctoral training and therefore a logical target for post-degree mentoring.

From One-Shot Workshops to Sustained, Community-Based Mentoring

A related strand of literature examines which interventions actually increase publication output. Single, lecture-style workshops appear to offer limited long-term benefits compared with sustained, community-based approaches, such as writing groups and manuscript clinics, which allow participants to work on an actual manuscript over time (Cargill & Burgess, 2017). Habibie and Hyland (2019) similarly argue that novice scholars benefit most when mentoring centers on real submissions and ongoing feedback, a "writing for publication" pedagogy rather than decontextualized instruction. Together, this literature suggests that an effective intervention should combine substantive manuscript feedback, explicit guidance on journal selection and predatory-journal avoidance, and a means of addressing the APC barrier.

Positioning the Present Study

This body of research indicates that the barriers facing Indonesian academics are linguistic, structural, financial, and informational, and that generic, one-off training is unlikely to resolve them. What remains underexplored is how these barriers are distributed and weighted within a specific disciplinary and institutional setting, information needed before an evidence-based program can be designed. The present study addresses this gap by empirically mapping the readiness, obstacles, and expectations of FISIP lecturers, so that program design is grounded in participants' actual profiles and, as argued above, can be adapted by faculties elsewhere with similar profiles.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive quantitative approach, supplemented by qualitative analysis of open-ended responses. The population comprised all lecturers at FISIP, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Yogyakarta, and sampling followed a voluntary response method via an online questionnaire distributed to prospective participants.

The instrument comprised three parts: (A) basic participant information; (B) experience with and understanding of international publishing; and (C) expectations regarding planned activities. Part B used two four-point Likert scales: one measuring perceived obstacle severity (1 =

not an obstacle to 4 = a major obstacle) and one measuring self-assessed conceptual understanding (1 = very limited to 4 = strong understanding). Mean scores on both scales were interpreted using four equal-width intervals bounded by the theoretical minimum and maximum: 1.00–1.75, 1.76–2.50, 2.51–3.25, and 3.26–4.00. Open-ended responses in Parts B and C were analyzed thematically using inductive categorization, while quantitative data were examined descriptively using frequencies, percentages, and mean scores.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic and Academic Profile of Respondents

Respondents were drawn from across FISIP's disciplines, with Business Administration (34.5%) and International Relations (27.6%) accounting for the largest shares, followed by Communication Studies (24.1%), Public Relations (10.3%), and the Master's program in Communication Studies, MIKOM (3.4%). By academic rank, Associate Professors (Lektor) predominate (51.7%), followed by Senior Associate Professors (Lektor Kepala, 31.0%), Assistant Professors (Asisten Ahli, 13.8%), and full Professors (Guru Besar, 3.4%). Most respondents (22 individuals) have more than twenty years of service, and a doctoral degree is the most common highest qualification (58.6%).

This profile indicates that the program's target participants are at a career stage when accelerated international publication matters most, particularly for promotion to Senior Associate Professor and Professor, consistent with the two motivations most often cited for joining the workshop: academic development (82.8%) and career advancement (69.0%).

Initial Readiness and Publication Experience

A large majority of respondents (93.1%) were actively engaged in research, and 96.6% had already set a target for international publication. In addition, 62.1% already had a manuscript draft with publication potential, and 79.3% had previously taken part in some form of publication training — figures that point to a high level of participatory readiness and suggest that interventions should build on existing competence rather than repeat introductory-level training.

Over the past three years, article output has clustered at one to two articles (55.2%) and three to five articles (31.0%), with only 10.3% having published more than ten. Table 1 presents respondents' target publication databases.

Table 1. Target databases for international journal publication

Database	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Scopus	23	79.3%
DOAJ	16	55.2%
Web of Science	14	48.3%
Other	7	24.1%

(Primary source, 2026)

Scopus's dominance aligns with national performance policy, while the substantial share also considering DOAJ indicates some awareness of open-access publishing, alongside a corresponding risk of exposure to journals of uncertain reputation. In terms of authorship roles, 69.0% had served as co-author, 65.5% as first author, and 51.7% as corresponding author — experience that suggests mentoring could usefully strengthen the corresponding-author role, the position most directly responsible for managing communication with editors.

Obstacles to International Publication

Obstacles to publication were assessed using the four-point scale described in Section 3, and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean scores for perceived obstacles to international publication (scale 1–4)

Obstacle	Mean Score
APC / publication fee	3.21
Selection of target journal	3.10
Structuring the manuscript	≈ 3.00
Peer review and revision process	≈ 2.90
Writing in English	2.48

(Primary source, 2026)

Financial and strategic obstacles — APC costs and journal selection — were rated as moderate and more burdensome than linguistic obstacles. The comparatively low score for writing in English (2.48) falls just within the minor-obstacle band, suggesting that FISIP lecturers feel reasonably confident about this aspect of manuscript preparation, likely reinforced by the 72.4% who already use Grammarly and the 82.8% who use Mendeley or Zotero. By contrast, publication funding calls for an institutional response, such as a competitive APC subsidy scheme.

For conceptual understanding, the lowest score was for avoiding predatory journals (2.62), followed by strategies for selecting reputable journals (2.86), the peer review process (2.90), and research novelty (2.93). All four fall within the adequate-understanding band, but their relative positions still mark journal-selection literacy as the area of greatest vulnerability and, accordingly, a priority for workshop content. Vulnerability to predatory journals also carries reputational risk, since it can invalidate a publication's recognition in BKD evaluation or promotion.

Three-quarters of respondents (75.9%) had experienced at least one rejection, most commonly due to a mismatch with the journal's scope, methodological weaknesses, insufficient novelty, and inadequate presentation of results and discussion — sections respondents also rated as the hardest to write (mean scores 3.10–3.14).

Expectations Regarding the Mentoring Program

The most anticipated format was the manuscript clinic (82.8%), followed by small-group mentoring (41.4%) and theory-based workshops (31.0%), supporting the argument that FISIP lecturers need a consultative forum centered on their own manuscripts rather than theoretical lectures (Cargill & Burgess, 2017).

All respondents (100%) were willing to continue mentoring until their manuscripts were ready for submission, with most expecting outcomes ranging from submission-ready to actually submitted, and some hoping to reach acceptance. Open-ended responses about expectations revealed three dominant themes: (a) publication in a reputable journal (Scopus Q1–Q2); (b) continuity of mentoring through a recurring clinic held at least every six months; and (c) alignment between instructor expertise and participants' discipline.

Implications for Program Design

Together, these findings suggest designing the program as a sustained intervention with three components: (1) discipline-based manuscript clinics that strengthen methodology and the results-and-discussion sections; (2) a module on journal-selection literacy and predatory-journal risk mitigation, using tools such as Scopus Sources, Scimago, and Journal Finder; and (3) internal policy advocacy for APC funding, given that financial constraints were respondents' most pressing obstacle. Because these components address structural rather than purely local conditions,

faculties elsewhere with a similar obstacle profile should be able to adopt a broadly similar structure, adjusting only the disciplinary content of the clinics.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that FISIP lecturers are, on the whole, well positioned for international publication, as evidenced by their high research activity, publication targets, and manuscript drafts. The most significant obstacles are financial and strategic — APC costs and journal selection — while the most pronounced conceptual weakness is the ability to identify and avoid predatory journals. The intervention best suited to these needs is a sustained manuscript clinic led by instructors whose expertise aligns with participants' disciplinary background.

Beyond its immediate institutional purpose, this study offers an empirical basis and a replicable diagnostic model for designing mentoring programs that are contextually grounded rather than assumption-driven. Faculties elsewhere facing comparable performance-based publication mandates and resource constraints may adapt the same instrument and framework for their own lecturers, even when their specific results differ — findings that point toward manuscripts progressing from submission-ready to acceptance in reputable international journals.

LIMITATIONS & FURTHER RESEARCH

Several limitations qualify these findings and point to directions for future research. First, the 29 respondents were volunteers who completed an online questionnaire; this voluntary sampling is prone to self-selection, since lecturers who are already research-active and publication-oriented may have been more inclined to respond, so the readiness levels reported here likely represent an optimistic rather than a fully representative estimate of the wider faculty population. A larger, more systematically sampled population would strengthen future replications.

Second, the analysis relied entirely on descriptive statistics; no inferential tests were conducted to determine whether relationships suggested in the discussion, such as the one between authorship experience and confidence in the corresponding-author role, are statistically significant or merely descriptive. Correlational or regression-based techniques could test whether elements of the obstacle profile, such as APC cost or journal-selection literacy, meaningfully predict actual publication output.

Third, this is a single-institution, single-faculty case study. As argued above, the obstacle framework and instrument are intended to be transferable, but the specific proportions reported here apply only to this sample and should not be generalized statistically without further testing. A multi-site comparative study administering the same instrument elsewhere would test this transferability empirically rather than asserting it on structural grounds alone.

Fourth, the data are cross-sectional and capture readiness before implementation, describing a starting point rather than an outcome; longitudinal follow-up tracking manuscripts from clinic through submission and eventual acceptance or rejection would establish whether the proposed design actually improves publication output, not merely whether it matches stated preferences. Finally, because the data are self-reported, responses may be subject to social desirability or recall bias; future studies could triangulate them with institutional records such as SINTA or Scopus author profiles.

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