Deanship of Scientific Research

Breaking through the Ivory Tower of High-Indexed Journals: Insights from EFL Academics in Private Universities, East Java, Indonesia

Azza Jauhar Ahmad Tajuddin[1] iD *, Dian Fadhilawati[2]** iD *, Faizal Risdianto[3]* iD *,*
Suyitno[4] iD *, Supriyono[2]* iD *, Ahmad Saifudin[5]* iD

[1]Center for Fundamental and Continuing Education, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia
[2]English Education Department, Universitas Islam Balitar, Blitar, Indonesia
[3]English Education Department, Universitas Islam Negeri Salatiga, Salatiga, Indonesia
[4]Elementary Education Department, Universitas Islam Balitar, Blitar, Indonesia
[5]English Education Department, Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Blitar, Blitar, Indonesia

Abstract

Objectives: This study aims to assess the productivity levels and challenges EFL academics face at private universities in East Java when publishing research in Scopus and Web of Science (WOS)-indexed journals and propose strategies for improving publication success.

Methods: The study used a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. A preliminary analysis of 288 EFL academics' publications indexed in Scopus and WoS was conducted using data from the Sinta database to evaluate productivity levels. To identify the main barriers to publishing in high-impact journals, an online survey was administered to 167 targeted EFL academics, with 165 completing it. Six participants were then interviewed in depth to gain further insights.

Results: The study indicates low research productivity among EFL academics in Scopus and WoS-indexed journals publications. The main barriers included financial constraints (high APCs, limited institutional funding), research competence (insufficient writing skills, difficulty publishing in reputable free journals, limited technology/AI proficiency), and institutional support/mentorship (lack of guidance, restricted access to resources, insufficient mentorship programs, and absence of personal mentors).

Conclusions: The findings highlight the urgent need for financial support, targeted academic writing training, investment in technology and artificial intelligence tools, and credible resource subscriptions. Academic mentorship from experts is also essential to strengthening EFL academics' capacity to publish in high-impact international journals.

Keywords: Publication challenges; scopus; web of science; EFL academics; higher education

<div dir="rtl">

اختراق برج العاج للمجلات عالية الفهرسة: رؤى من منشورات أكاديمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

عزة جوهر أحمد تاج الدين[1]، ديان فضيلاواتي[2]*، فيصل رزديانتو[3]، سويتنو[4]، سوبريونو[2]، أحمد سيف الدين[5]

[1]مركز التعليم الأساسي والمستمر، جامعة ماليزيا ترنجانو، ترنجانو، ماليزيا
[2]قسم تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية، جامعة الإسلام باليتار، بليتار، إندونيسيا
[3]قسم تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية، جامعة الإسلام الحكومية سلاتيجا، سلاتيجا، إندونيسيا
[4]قسم تعليم المرحلة الابتدائية، جامعة الإسلام بليتار، بليتار، إندونيسيا
[5]قسم تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية، جامعة نهضة العلماء بليتار، بليتار، إندونيسيا

ملخّص

الأهداف: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقييم مستويات الإنتاجية والتحديات التي يواجهها الأكاديميون في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية (EFL) في الجامعات الخاصة بشرق جاوة عند نشر أبحاثهم في المجلات المفهرسة في سكوبس (Scopus) وقاعدة بيانات ويب أوف ساينس (WoS)، واقتراح استراتيجيات لتحسين فرص النشر.

المنهجية: استخدمت الدراسة تصميماً مختلطاً تفسيرياً متتابعاً. أجري تحليل أولي لـ 288 من منشورات الأكاديميين في مجال تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية المفهرسة في سكوبس و WoS باستخدام بيانات من قاعدة بيانات (Sinta) لتقييم مستويات الإنتاجية. ولتحديد أهم العوائق أمام النشر في المجلات ذات التأثير العالي، تم توزيع استبيان إلكتروني على 167 أكاديمياً مستهدفاً، استكمله 165 منهم. ثم أجريت مقابلات معمقة مع ستة مشاركين للحصول على مزيد من التوضيح.

النتائج: تشير الدراسة إلى انخفاض الإنتاجية البحثية بين الأكاديميين في مجال تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في ما يتعلق بالنشر في مجلات سكوبس و WoS. تمثلت أهم العوائق في: (القيود المالية)ارتفاع رسوم النشر، محدودية التمويل المؤسسي، (الكفاءة البحثية)ضعف مهارات الكتابة الأكاديمية، صعوبة النشر في المجلات المرموقة المجانية، محدودية الإلمام بالتكنولوجيا والذكاء الاصطناعي، (والدعم المؤسسي/الإشراف الأكاديمي)غياب التوجيه، محدودية الوصول إلى الموارد، ضعف برامج الإرشاد الأكاديمي، وانعدام وجود مرشدين شخصيين.(

الخلاصة: تبرز النتائج الحاجة الملحّة إلى توفير الدعم المالي، والتدريب الأكاديمي المتخصص، والاستثمار في التكنولوجيا وأدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي، فضلاً عن الاشتراكات في المصادر الموثوقة. كما أن الإشراف الأكاديمي من الخبراء يعد ضرورياً لتعزيز قدرة الأكاديميين في مجال تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية على النشر في المجلات الدولية ذات التأثير العالي.

الكلمات الدالة: تحديات النشر، سكوبس، شبكة العلوم للنشر، أكاديميو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، التعليم العالي.

</div>

1. Introduction

Research publication is pivotal in advancing knowledge, fostering intellectual engagement, and building academic communities in higher education. Publication in high-impact journals indexed by Scopus and WOS (WOS) is a crucial measure of academic success since it represents the most remarkable accomplishment (Pranckutė, 2021; Phoocharoensil, 2022). The research published in those indexed journals was highly acknowledged for the impact on scholars' individual, institutional, and international status (Rawat & Meena, 2014; Chadegani et al., 2017).

Further, to advance academic career, fulfill graduation requirements, or become a professor, academics worldwide need to publish in journals indexed by Scopus or WoS (Cargill et al., 2018; Anderson & Okuda, 2020; Phoocharoensil, 2022; Warren, 2018; Adnan & Purwo, 2022). Additionally, Publications in those journals could increase citation rates, raise university rankings, and increase institutional and individual recognition (Teka et al., 2017; Kwiek, 2021; Yeon, 2021; O.Olujuwon et al., 2023). Notwithstanding their significance, publishing in these journals poses several difficulties because of the competitive environment, the rigorous peer-review procedures, and the numerous rejections (Paltridge & Starfield, 2023; Pho & Tran, 2016; Arsyad et al., 2019; Teixeira da Silva, 2021; Asif et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, especially in private universities in East Java, EFL academics have low research engagement to publish research in high-impact indexed journals (Fadhilawati et al., 2024). These difficulties are made worse by institutional pressures, limited access to global research networks, and language competency (Adnan & Purwo, 2022). Private university researchers in Indonesia frequently struggle to get international recognition, and their preference for volume over quality can lead to more conference proceedings than excellent journals (Huda et al., 2020; Purnell, 2019)..

This study addresses these challenges by exploring two key research questions:

1. What are the research productivity levels of EFL academics at 30 private universities in East Java, Indonesia, especially in Scopus and WoS-indexed journals publications?
2. What are the main challenges of EFL academics in publishing research in Scopus and WoS-indexed journals, and what targeted interventions can enhance their productivity and publication success?

These inquiries pinpoint EFL academics' barriers to publishing research in Scopus and WoS-indexed journals and provide strategies to enhance productivity. The findings offer practical recommendations to boost the quality and global impact of research from this region.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Publishing in Scopus and WOS

Scopus and WoS are highly regarded academic databases with extensive coverage and rigorous inclusion criteria (Pranckutė, 2021; Orduna-Malea et al., 2019). Scopus, created by Elsevier, is a multidisciplinary platform that contains scholarly journals, conference proceedings, and patents. It also includes citation analysis tools to help researchers comprehensively assess their impact (Chadegani et al., 2017). Similarly, the Thomson Reuters Institute of Scientific Information's WoS comprises multiple citation databases that collect data from journals, conferences, books, and reports (Chadegani et al., 2017). Publishing in these indexed journals is considered prestigious since it promotes visibility, citation potential, and research credibility (Kubiatko, 2015). Scholars who publish in Scopus or WoS journals benefit from increased career possibilities, professional recognition, and broader distribution of their work (Suiter & Sarli, 2019).

2.2 Publication Maze of Scopus and WOS-Indexed Journals

Despite the benefits, publishing in Scopus and WoS-indexed journals is commonly called a "publication maze" due to the multiple obstacles that academics must overcome. These include stringent peer-review procedures, precise formatting criteria, and high editing standards (Pilar, 2012; Thrower, 2012). Peer-reviewed journals require adherence to criteria for plagiarism, completeness, research quality, and language proficiency. Furthermore, the financial strain imposed by Article Processing Charges (APC) is expensive (Halevi & Walsh, 2021). Open-access journals, for example, charge an average of $2,000 in APC, whereas hybrid journals can charge up to USD 3,000 (Solomon & Bjork, 2016). In

addition to the financial barrier, limited English proficiency, and unfamiliarity with conventional academic writing styles, especially among non- native English speakers (Arsyad & Arono, 2016).

Indonesian academics, in particular, suffer similar challenges, as they battle with high publishing fees and frequently need more vital writing skills, making it difficult for them to publish in high-impact journals. In Indonesia, additional barriers make the Publication of Scopus and WOS-indexed journals more difficult. These include language barriers, limited access to international research networks, and institutional demands to publish for career advancement or university rankings in countries (Adnan & Purwo, 2022). Academics at private universities frequently find themselves in a weaker position than their contemporaries at public institutions, owing to fewer resources and less exposure to worldwide research collaborations. As a result, private university research often has a poorer effect than global awareness in excellent journals (Huda et al., 2020). Furthermore, the emphasis on quantity over quality may result in an over-reliance on conference proceedings, which do not always match the highest standards of academic rigor and excellent journals (Purnell, 2019).

2.3   Strategies to Break the Ivory Tower of Scopus and WOS

Many scholars have proposed strategies to break the ivory tower of Scopus and WOS publications. Researchers like Paltridge & Starfield (2023), Pilar (2012), Candal-Pedreira et al. (2023), and Sovacool et al. (2022) emphasized the need for meticulous preparation to meet the rigorous standards required by Scopus and WOS. Building a mentorship program has been identified as a critical strategy for enhancing the visibility and success of academics (Brown et al., 2020). Workshops and short courses focusing on vital areas such as research methodologies, academic writing, and journal selection can empower academic staff to navigate the complexities of high-impact publishing (Pho & Tran, 2016). Financial support from institutions is also critical. Universities should allocate resources to cover publication fees and provide access to relevant research materials and databases (Arsyad et al., 2019; Pho & Tran, 2016). Such support ensures that academics can engage with international journals without financial constraints. Furthermore, institutions can establish reward systems to recognize and celebrate successful publications, which could motivate academics to aim for higher-quality research output databases (Arsyad et al., 2019).

2.4   Theoretical Framework and Research Gap

Several studies have influenced the theoretical framework of this research. Pilar (2012) explored Spanish researchers' challenges in publishing research articles in English, particularly financial constraints and language barriers. Similarly, Garwe (2015) examined the publication challenges in Zimbabwean higher education, identifying institutional and economic barriers as significant factors. Pho & Tran (2016) highlighted Vietnamese academics' difficulties in publishing in the social sciences and humanities. Cargill et al. (2018) evaluated the effectiveness of workshops designed to help Chinese graduate students prepare for international Publication. These studies emphasized the importance of institutional support, mentorship, and financial assistance in overcoming barriers to high-impact Publication. In the Indonesian context, Arsyad et al. (2019) focused on the challenges academics face in publishing in international journals, while Purwanto et al. (2021) examined the barriers experienced by doctoral students. Hanief et al. (2021) and Yeon (2021) identified factors impeding academics' productivity in international journals.

Moreover, Greussing et al. (2020) explored researchers' views, approaches, and engagement with Open Access (OA) publishing. Halevi & Walsh (2021) studied academics' perceptions of APC for Publication in OA articles. Teixeira da Silva (2021) underscored early-career researchers' obstacles in academic research and Publication. Candal-Pedreira et al. (2023) reviewed the difficulties encountered in the peer review process, focusing on ensuring the quality and transparency of the editorial procedures in scientific journals. O.Olujuwon et al. (2023) researched barriers to Publication in high-impact journals in Africa, Paltridge & Starfield (2023) analyzed the PhD publications in the humanities and social sciences, and Polas (2024) conducted a literature review on academics' publication challenges and strategies for publishing in top-tier journals.

The existing literature has explored various challenges and strategies for publishing in high-impact journals across different contexts. However, there is limited research on the specific barriers EFL academics face in private universities in East Java, Indonesia. This study aims to fill this gap by evaluating the level of research productivity and the challenges they face in publishing in Scopus and WoS journals among 288 EFL academics from 30 private universities in East Java, Indonesia. It proposes targeted interventions to enhance productivity and publication success in high-impact journals. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of these academics' challenges and propose strategies to enhance their publication success in Scopus and WoS-indexed journals. This research will ultimately benefit the academic community and the broader English as a Foreign Language field.

3. Method

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-method design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine research productivity among EFL academics. The first phase involved a quantitative analysis of Scopus and WOS (WOS) publications from the Sinta Database, focusing on the output levels of 288 EFL academics across 30 English Education Departments (EEDs). The researchers used an interval classification method to categorize research productivity as low, moderate, or high (Sugiyono, 2016).

The researchers distributed an online survey to gain EFL academics' challenges in Scopus and WOS Publications. The purposive sampling method targeted active and permanent lecturers, having National Lecturer Identification Numbers, teaching in S1 English Education Departments at private universities in East Java, and possessing at least two years of teaching experience. Slovin's formula determined a target sample size of 167 participants from the total population of 288, yielding 165 valid, robust responses (Kaur, 2017; Turner, 2019; Memon et al., 2020). The survey consisted of 25 items adapted from Heng et al. (2020), examining factors influencing research productivity. A pilot test involving 37 EFL lecturers confirmed the survey's validity, with Content Validity Ratios (CVR) exceeding 0.68 and a Cronbach's Alpha of 0,7 indicating high reliability and internal consistency. The researchers utilized Descriptive statistics to analyze the survey data.

Meanwhile, in the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six EFL lecturers who had completed the survey and consented to participate in follow-up discussions. These interviews provided more profound insights into the quantitative findings, particularly the challenges related to high-impact publishing. Participants were selected based on their willingness and represented diverse experiences. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Yin, 2016), which offered a richer understanding of EFL academics' barriers to achieving publication success in Scopus and WOS-indexed journals.

4. Results

4.1 The Level of EFL Academics' Productivity in Publishing Research on Scopus and WOS-Indexed Journals

To determine the level of productivity, the researchers used the total academic output in Scopus and WOS taken from the Sinta database. Then, they categorized based on Sugiyono's (2016) method. The scholarly productivity levels in three resulting intervals: For Scopus level, high (scores $\geq$ 13), moderate (7 to 12), and low (0 - 6). Similarly, WOS was categorized into high ($\geq$ 4), mild (2 to 3), and low (0-1). The summary of the categorization results is shown in the following figure;
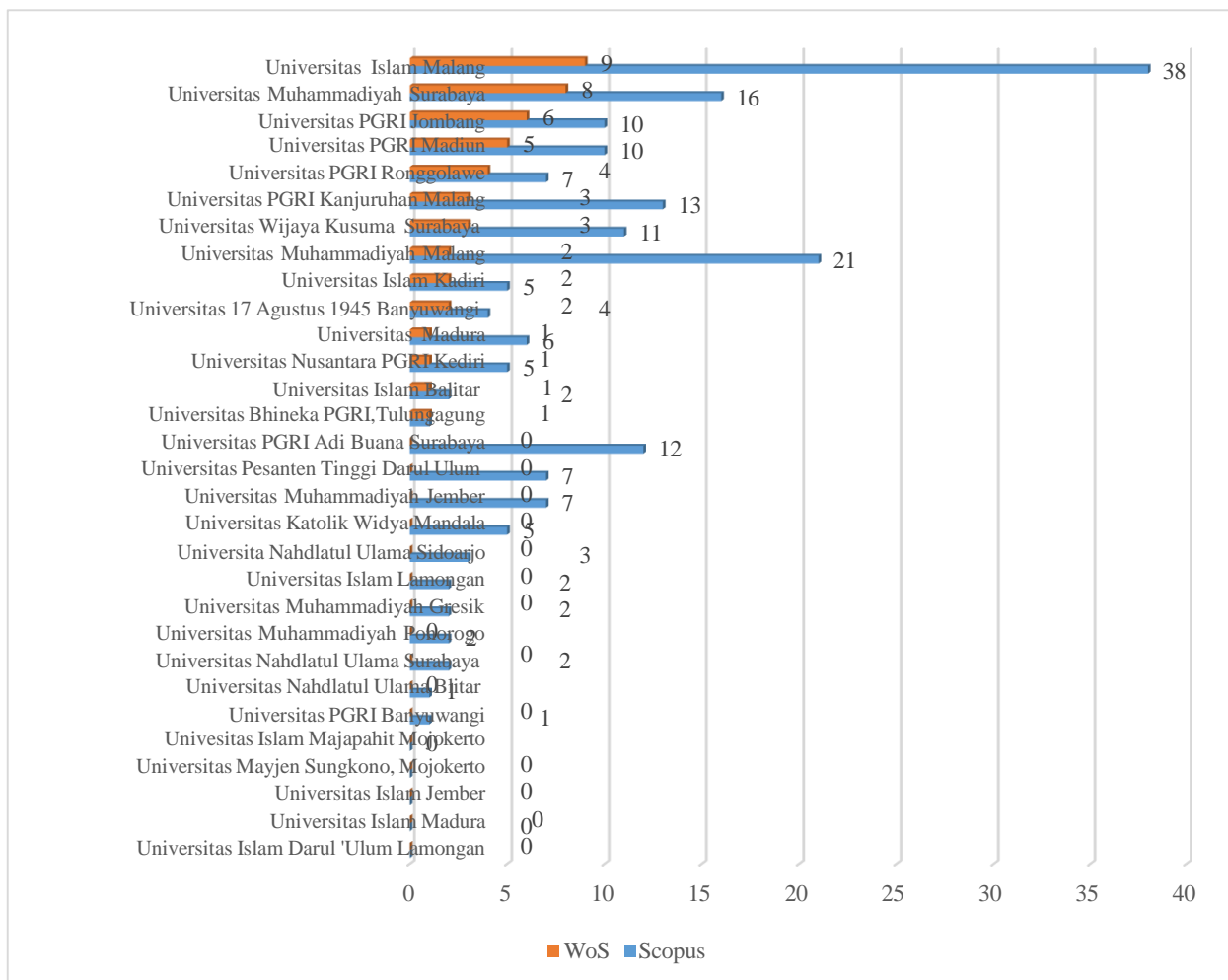
Figure 1. EFL Academics' Productivity in Publishing on Scopus and WOS-Indexed Journals

Based on the results above, the Publication of EFL academics at private universities in East Java, Indonesia, in Scopus-indexed journals was primarily low. Of the 30 English Education Departments (EED), six departments belong to the high category (20%), seven departments belong to the moderate category (23.33%), and 17 departments belong to the low category (56.67%). In addition, the Publication in WOS-indexed journals shows a similar trend, with most departments also in the low category. Among the 30 EEDs, four departments belong to the high category (13.33%), six departments belong to the moderate category (20%), and 20 departments belong to the low category (66.67%). From the results above, the implications are that EFL academics at private universities in East Java, Indonesia, exhibit a predominantly low level of publication productivity in both Scopus and WOS-indexed journals.

4.2 The Publication Mazes Impeding EFL Academics from Publishing Research in International Reputable Journals

The researcher conducted an online survey to underscore the academics' challenges of publishing research in a journal indexed by Scopus and WOS. The outcomes are presented in detail in Table 2 as follows;

Table 2. Publication mazes impeding EFL academics in internationally reputable journals.

NO	STATEMENTS	SD 1 %	D 2 %	SD SA 3 %	A 4 %	SA 5 %	M %
1	I cannot afford the high publication fees for Scopus and WoS journals	0,00	0,00	13,94	59,39	26,67	82,55
2	The research funding provided by the institution could not cover the Article Processing Charges of Scopus or WoS-indexed journals	0,00	0,61	16,97	54,55	27,88	81,94
3	I am not confident enough in my writing for Publication in Scopus or WoS Journals	0,00	4,85	13,94	52,12	29,09	81,09
4	Publishing in free reputable journals indexed by Scopus or WOS is challenging for me	0,00	7,27	10,91	54,55	27,27	80,36
5	I am not mastering enough technology and AI to write academic articles in Scopus and WoS journals	0,00	4,24	18,18	50,91	26,67	80.00
6	I am not familiar with the publication process in Scopus and WoS-indexed journals	0,00	6,67	15,15	50,91	27,27	79,76
7	The shortage of research resources and library access to reputable international journals diminishes my motivation	0,00	4,85	21,21	48,48	25,45	78,91
8	There is an insufficient mentorship program for writing and publishing articles for reputable journals indexed by Scopus or WoS at my institution	0,00	5,45	18,18	53,33	23,03	78,79
9	I have a lot of administrative tasks to do at my institution, which hinders me from publishing in Scopus and WoS journals.	0,00	6,06	23,64	47,27	23,03	77,45
10	I heard that the review process of publishing in Scopus and WoS Journals is challenging and long	0,00	8,48	23,64	49,70	18,18	75,52
11	I have a heavy teaching load in my institution, which hinders me from publishing in Scopus and WoS-indexed journals	0,00	12,12	21,21	43,64	23,03	75,52
12	I am afraid of being rejected for publishing in Scopus or WoS journals	0,00	9,09	24,24	48,48	18,18	75,15
13	I am not good at data analysis, which results in poor research articles	0,00	10,30	23,03	49,09	17,58	74,79
14	The journals indexed by Scopus and WoS in the English field are limited	0,00	11,52	21,82	47,88	18,79	74,79
15	Most of my colleagues do not publish their research in reputable journals indexed by Scopus or WoS.	0,00	7,88	27,27	48,48	16,36	74,67
16	I have limited knowledge of research methods and procedures required for Scopus and WoS journals.	0,00	10,30	24,24	47,88	17,58	74,55
17	I do not have a mentor to discuss my publishing in Scopus or WoS-indexed journals	0,00	11,52	22,42	47,88	18,18	74,55
18	I am not proficient in reviewing and criticizing literature needed for writing an article in Scopus or WoS publications.	0,00	6,06	36,36	45,45	12,12	72,73
19	The review process for publishing in Scopus and WoS-indexed journals should be shorter.	0,00	12,12	27,27	45,45	15,15	72,73
20	It is difficult for me to find the gap in the study	0,00	13,33	26,67	44,85	15,15	72,36
21	There is no reward system or incentives provided by my institution for successful Publication in Scopus or WoS journals	0,00	7,27	35,15	46,67	10,91	72,24
22	I do not have a research network or communication channel to support my writing and publishing for Scopus and WoS journals	0,00	7,88	36,36	46,06	9,70	71,52
23	There are many requirements for publishing in Scopus and WoS journals, which are stressful for me	0,00	7,27	39,39	45,45	7,88	70,79
24	I am not motivated to publish in Scopus or WoS Journals, because it is not my priority now	0,00	6,06	43,64	41,21	9,09	70,67
25	I think publishing in national journals is enough for me	0,00	9,70	47,88	32,73	9,70	68,48

Note: SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, SDSA: Slightly Disagree-Slightly Agree, A: Agree, and SA: Strongly Agree

6

Table 2 presents the significant obstacles that hinder EFL academics at private universities in East Java from publishing in internationally reputable journals indexed by Scopus and WoS. The findings reveal three dominant dimensions of barriers: financial constraints, research competence, and institutional support/mentorship. From the financial perspective, the inability to afford high article processing charges (APCs) emerged as the most critical challenge, with 82.55% of respondents agreeing that publication fees were unaffordable. Similarly, 81.94% indicated that the institutional research funding could not cover APCs. Regarding research competence, lack of writing confidence was evident, as 81.09% of participants admitted they were not confident enough to write for Scopus or WoS journals. Additionally, 80.36% considered publishing in reputable open-access journals highly complicated, while 80.00% reported insufficient mastery of technology and AI tools essential for producing quality academic articles. Institutional support and mentorship also proved inadequate. For example, 78.91% of respondents highlighted the lack of research resources and limited library access, while 78.79% pointed to insufficient mentorship programs. Furthermore, administrative burdens (77.45%) and heavy teaching loads (75.52%) were recognized as additional obstacles.

4.3 The Result of the Interview

The researchers interviewed six EFL academics from private universities in East Java, Indonesia, during the qualitative stage to probe deeper into their experiences and ideas regarding the hurdles they face in disseminating research results in recognized journals and to learn what techniques they desire to overcome these barriers, as described as follows:

Financial Constraints: APC and Lack of Funding Support

Article Processing Charges (APC) pose a significant obstacle for all interviewed academics when publishing in Scopus or WoS-indexed journals. For example, Participant 1 (P1) mentioned that APCs often range from 3 to 20 million Indonesian Rupiah, sometimes equal to a semester's salary, making publishing challenging without institutional or government support. Echoed this, emphasizing that a lack of internal funding and inaccessible government grants restrict their ability to publish in international journals. Both respondents suggested institutions create funds to cover APCs and improve access to government grants for smaller universities. P3 recommends that institutions provide financial support designated explicitly for covering APCs. This support could reduce the financial burden on individual researchers. He also proposed that government initiatives or grants should include provisions for covering APCs, especially for academics from smaller or less well-funded institutions. Such initiatives would make it more feasible for researchers to publish in reputable international journals.

The participants' concerns are reflected in the following comments:

"I hope my university and government will provide special funds or other ways to help academics pay for the high APC that comes with Scopus or WoS. This would help me publish my research there. However, I have learned that some institutions, especially small and newly established ones, do not have enough funding to support their workers in publication because the funding is mostly focused on the urgent things like building facilities and infrastructure for students." (P1)

"My faculty provides limited internal research funding,500.000- 1500.000 yearly, for a project I conduct. I find it hard to publish my work in well-known international journals indexed by Scopus or WoS with that amount. On top of that, getting study grants from the government is hard for me. So, I chose to have my study published in reputable national journals" (P3)

Lack of Writing Proficiency for Publishing in Reputable Journals

Writing in English for reputable journals presents a significant challenge for EFL academics, who frequently need more confidence in their academic writing abilities. For example, P5 admitted to delaying submitting papers due to concerns about achieving international standards, but P2 and P4 emphasized the difficulty of constructing arguments and utilizing suitable academic language. The participants indicated that colleges provide specialized writing seminars, mentorship programs, and peer review groups to assist students in developing their writing skills and gaining confidence. P5

especially underlined the necessity for competent mentors to help academics navigate the writing process.

"I often feel my writing does not meet the standards for international journals. Even when my research is good, I hesitate to submit it because I lack confidence in my English writing. My limited experience with academic writing in English and fear of rejection hold me back. Writing for these journals requires more than good research– critical thinking, originality, and up-to-date references from reputable sources." (P5)

"Improving my English writing is crucial for publishing in international journals. Though an EFL academic, I struggle to present my research clearly and precisely. Crafting well-structured arguments and dealing with the complexities of academic language is challenging. I know I need to practice a lot more." (P2)

Challenges in Publishing in Free-Reputable Journals

Though free-to-publish journals appear a viable alternative to APC, academics need help to meet their stringent submission requirements. P4 highlighted the lengthy and complex publishing process in respectable open-access journals, which can take years to complete. To address these issues, another suggested that institutions provide workshops and mentorship from experienced academics who have successfully published in these publications. Training to navigate the submission and review processes was rated critical for success.

"To publish in free, well-known international journals, you have to strictly follow quality standards and fully understand how to submit and have your work reviewed. Things are not always as simple as they might seem. Sometimes it takes a year or two to come out." (P4)

"I need strong support to learn how to write in free, reputable international journals. Especially classes or training with experts who have published there before to help us get ready, peer mentoring programs to learn from our colleagues' experiences, and pushing for submission processes that are simplified and standardized." (P6).

Lack of Technological and AI proficiency

Mastering technological tools and AI is increasingly essential for academic writing, yet many academics, especially older academics, need help with these tools. P6 mentioned challenges using reference managers like Mendeley, paraphrasing tools like QuillBot, and plagiarism checkers like Turnitin or Zotero. P6 recommended ongoing training and support to help academics become proficient in using these technologies, which are vital for producing high-quality research papers. Further, workshops and access to tools like Grammarly are needed to reduce the burden and improve the quality of submissions.

"…mastering the technological aspects and AI for academic writing has become critical today. The requirement to use reference managers like Mendeley or Zotero, employ tools such as Quillbot for paraphrasing, ensure impeccable grammar using Grammarly, and subject manuscripts to the scrutiny of Turnitin for plagiarism checks adds complexity to the writing process. I hope my university will hold regular workshops and training sessions on using these tech tools effectively. Giving us access to these tools and teaching us how to use them can make things much easier and help us write better research papers." (P6)

Lack of Mentorship and Research Resources

Another primary concern expressed by participants was the lack of mentorship and inadequate access to reputable international research resources. Several participants admitted they did not have personal mentors to guide them through the publishing process. For example, P3 emphasized that limited mentoring opportunities made understanding the requirements of Scopus and WoS journals difficult. At the same time, P3 highlighted the absence of senior colleagues who could provide feedback on drafts and advice on journal selection.

"I do not have a mentor who can guide me in preparing articles for Scopus or WoS. Often, I feel lost in terms of journal choice and how to revise after rejection." (P3)

Access to reputable databases was also mentioned as a critical barrier. P4 explained that their institution's library subscriptions were limited, preventing them from keeping up with current research trends. Similarly, P4underlined that the lack of access to journals from publishers such as restricted their ability to cite updated, high-quality references.

"My library does not subscribe to journals from credible publishers such as Elsevier, Sage, Taylor & Francis, Routledge, Springer, or Wiley because of limited funding. Therefore, I usually use free online search engines to find references." (P4).

Overall, the interviews highlight several significant barriers EFL academics face in private universities, including unaffordable APCs, limited institutional funding, low confidence in English academic writing, and the demanding requirements of reputable open-access journals. These challenges are compounded by difficulties in mastering technological tools, a lack of mentoring support, and restricted access to updated international research resources. Addressing these issues through targeted funding schemes, writing support, training in digital tools, and broader access to academic databases is crucial for enabling academics to publish in reputable Scopus- and WoS-indexed journals.

5. Discussion

This study demonstrates that the research productivity level of EFL academics in East Java's private universities remains low, particularly concerning publications in Scopus- and WoS-indexed journals. The findings highlight three critical and interrelated barriers: financial constraints, limited research competence, and insufficient institutional support.

First, financial challenges are the most pressing. The high APC for open-access journals exceeds 2,000 USD, and hybrid journals charge over 3,000 USD for each Publication. Solomon & Bjork (2016) note that these fees are frequently too expensive for academics. This difficulty is consistent with the findings of Greussing et al. (2020) and Purwanto et al. (2021), who also recognized APC as a significant obstacle to academic Publication. Halevi & Walsh (2021) add to this, adding that academics frequently regard the financial burden of APC as overwhelming. For many, an APC is equivalent to several months' wages, and with limited institutional research funding and access to government subsidies or grants, publishing in renowned journals becomes highly challenging. Respondent recommends providing additional institutional research funding and government funding access. This finding is consistent with the general literature arguing for increased financial support for academic publishing, as are Cargill et al.'s (2018) findings. To address budgetary hurdles, institutions could explore offering more robust funding methods through internal grants or advocating for national-level research funding for APC.

Another major obstacle is English writing proficiency, a severe issue for EFL scholars. Garwe (2015) and Arsyad et al. (2019) found similar challenges in Zimbabwe and Indonesia, where writing in English, particularly in a highly specialized academic context, is difficult. Hanief et al. (2021) discovered that writing proficiency is a significant challenge for sports lecturers in Indonesia. Despite producing strong research results, many academics need more confidence or abilities to write at the level demanded by international publications. High-quality research writing necessitates critical analysis, originality, a clear identification of research gaps, and current references from credible sources. Participants in this study emphasized their lack of confidence and difficulty meeting these high requirements, which frequently discourages them from submitting their work.

Furthermore, Paltridge & Starfield (2023) pointed out that the academic writing process for foreign publications is frequently lengthy and necessitates significant modifications. These stringent requirements, plagiarism concerns, adherence to journal-specific criteria, and the need for good technique make the submission process more difficult for less experienced academics (Thrower, 2012). Writing workshops, mentorship programs, and peer review groups have all been

suggested to help students develop the skills and confidence they need to write well in academic settings. Cargill et al. (2018) supported such initiatives, arguing that they can considerably enhance the quality and quantity of research submissions. Publishing in reputed free journals is another problem, especially for academics who cannot afford hefty APCs. While these journals provide a viable alternative, they are incredibly competitive, with strict peer review processes and significant rejection rates (Paltridge & Starfield, 2023).

Additionally, free reputable indexed journals listed in Scopus and WOS frequently have lengthy review processes and need strict formatting and citation rules, making the submission process more difficult with high editorial standards (Pilar, 2012; Thrower, 2012). Academics must also compete for limited journal space, and the requirement to maintain good editorial standards makes publishing more challenging. Higher education might establish focused mentorship programs in which professionals with successful publication records coach less experienced academics through the submission process. Engaging experienced writers or consultants who specialize in academic publications can assist in demystifying the process by providing practical insights and ideas for improving article quality (Sovacool et al., 2022). According to Candal-Pedreira et al. (2023), peer review groups can also help enhance the submission quality by offering constructive criticism and preparing academics for the demands of journal reviews.

Another critical challenge for EFL academics in East Java is technological limits, namely, a need to master AI tools for academic writing. The increasing use of AI in scientific publishing creates benefits and challenges (Carobene et al., 2024). Mendeley and Zotero, for example, are vital tools for organizing references, while Turnitin software ensures originality. Similarly, writing tools such as Grammarly and QuillBot can help improve the grammar and clarity of academic writing. However, training on these tools' practical and ethical use still needs to be expanded, resulting in a gap in the publication process. The rapid progress of AI technology, which not all academics are prepared to deal with, and AI-assisted peer review systems, such as ChatGPT, are also promising in academic publishing. Fiorillo & Mehta (2024) observed that AI technology could improve the quality of peer reviews by providing specific comments and improving the review process. Youvan (2024) has emphasized that researchers must carefully consider the ethical consequences of AI. Issues such as equal access to AI tools and the integrity of AI-generated content are significant concerns that demand continual attention. The role of AI in increasing productivity while maintaining academic integrity is thus a delicate balancing act that institutions must master. Given these obstacles, universities should provide facilities regarding technologies and AI for research, prioritize training programs and mentors that familiarize academics with AI tools and their ethical applications. By improving researchers' technological capability, institutions may ensure that academics are more prepared to satisfy international publishing requirements.

Finally, institutional support and mentoring structures remain underdeveloped. Respondents frequently reported a lack of access to updated international resources and inadequate guidance from senior academics. Previous research (Cargill et al., 2018; Candal-Pedreira et al., 2023) highlights the importance of expert mentorship and peer support networks in improving publication success. However, such initiatives are still limited in many private universities.

While this study sheds light on the issues that EFL academics face at East Java's private colleges, certain limitations must be addressed. The study focuses solely on East Java and two specific databases—Scopus and WOS—which may exclude findings from other geographies and platforms. Furthermore, relying on surveys and interviews increases the potential for response bias, which can influence data accuracy. The study's cross-sectional approach may also neglect changes in the academic publishing ecosystem over time, and there is a risk of publication bias since overemphasized problems are over-represented while favorable features are under-represented. Finally, the researchers did not test the influence of barriers on productivity, limiting the findings' applicability to broader academic environments. Further, future researchers may conduct longitudinal studies examining how obstacles and production levels change over time. Testing the influence of barriers on low productivity will provide a more complete picture of the academic publishing scene for EFL academics.

6. Conclusion

The findings reveal that research productivity in Scopus and WoS-indexed journals remains low among EFL academics at private universities in East Java, Indonesia. Key barriers include financial constraints (high article processing charges and limited institutional research funding), limited research competence (insufficient academic writing skills, difficulties publishing in reputable open-access journals, and low proficiency in technology/AI tools), and inadequate institutional support (restricted access to scholarly resources, lack of a mentorship program, and insufficient research guidance). To address these challenges, universities need to provide greater financial support, deliver targeted academic training to build writing confidence, subscribe to credible research resources (e.g., Elsevier, Wiley, Routledge, Springer, etc.), establish structured mentorship programs with experienced publishing experts, and invest in technology and AI tools. Implementing these measures is crucial to strengthening the publication capacity of EFL academics in reputable international journals.

REFERENCES

Adnan, Z., & Purwo, B. K. (2022). Getting published in international journals: Perception of Indonesian scholars in linguistics and language education on the issues they face. In *JOALL Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literature,* 8(1), 19–40. https://doi.org/10.33369/joall.v8i1.21997

Anderson, T., & Okuda, T. (2020). Writing a Manuscript-Style Dissertation in TESOL/Applied Linguistics. *BC Teal*, 4(1), 1–23. Arsyad, S., & Arono. (2016). Potential problematic rhetorical style transfer from first language to foreign language: a case of Indonesian authors writing research article introductions in English. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 11(3), 315–330. https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2016.1153642

Arsyad, S., Purwo, B. K., Sukamto, K. E., & Adnan, Z. (2019). Factors Hindering Indonesian Lecturers from Publishing Articles in Reputable International Journals. *Journal on English as a Foreign Language*, 9(1), 42. https://doi.org/10.23971/jefl.v9i1.982

Asif, F., Jauhar, A., Tajuddin, A., & Khan, I. A. (2020). Rejection of the English Language Manuscripts Analysis of Reasons From the Editors' Perspective. *PA Arch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 17(4), 1553–1575.

Brown, R. D., Geesa, R. L., & McConnel, K. R. (2020). Creating, implementing, and redefining a conceptual framework for mentoring pathways for education doctorate students. *Higher Learning Research Communications*, 10(2), 20–37. https://doi.org/10.18870/hlrc.v10i2.1188

Candal-Pedreira, C., Rey-Brandariz, J., Varela-Lema, L., Pérez-Ríos, M., & Ruano-Ravina, A. (2023). Challenges in Peer Review: How to Guarantee the Quality and Transparency of the Editorial Process in Scientific Journals. *Anales de Pediatría (English Edition)*, 99(1), 54–59. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anpede.2023.05.006

Cargill, M., Gao, X., Wang, X., & Connor, P. O. (2018). Preparing Chinese Graduate Students of Science Facing an International Publication Requirement for Graduation: Adapting an Intensive Workshop Approach for Early-Candidature Use. *English for Specific Purposes*, 52, 13–26. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2018.05.002

Carobene, A., Padoan, A., Cabitza, F., Banfi, G., & Plebani, M. (2024). Rising adoption of artificial intelligence in scientific publishing: evaluating the role, risks, and ethical implications in paper drafting and review process. *Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine*, 62(5), 835–843. https://doi.org/10.1515/cclm-2023-1136

Chadegani, A. A., Salehi, H., Yunus, M., Farhadi, H., Fooladi, M., & Farhadi, M. (2017). A Comparison between Two Main Academic Literature Collections: WOS and Scopus Databases. *Asian Social Science*, 9(5), 18–26. https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v9n5p18

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design; Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches* (H. Salmon, N. Chelsea, M. O'Heffernan, D. C. Felts, & A. Mark, Eds.; Fifth). Sage Publications, Inc. https://lccn.loc.gov/2017044644

Fadhilawati, D., Jauhar Ahmad Tajuddin, A., Romly, R., Supriyono, S., Risdianto, F., & Saifudin, A. (2024). Unlocking Potential: A Closer Look at Research Engagement and Productivity Among EFL Academics in East Java, Indonesia. Arab World English Journal, 15(3), 255–269. https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol15no3.15

Fiorillo, L., & Mehta, V. (2024). Accelerating editorial processes in scientific journals: Leveraging AI for rapid manuscript review. *Oral Oncology Reports*, 10(May), 100511. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oor.2024.100511

Garwe, E. C. (2015). Obstacles to Research and Publication in Zimbabwean Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of the Research and Intellectual Expo. *International Research in Education*, 3(1), 119–138. https://doi.org/10.5296/ire.v3i1.7009

Greussing, E., Kuballa, S., Taddicken, M., Schulze, M., Mielke, C., & Haux, R. (2020). Drivers and Obstacles of Open Access Publishing. A Qualitative Investigation of Individual and Institutional Factors. *Frontiers in Communication*, 5(October). https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2020.587465

Halevi, G., & Walsh, S. (2021). Faculty Attitudes Towards Article Processing Charges for Open Access Articles. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 37(3), 384–398. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-021-09820-x

Hanief, Y. N., Haqiyah, A., Winarno, M. E., Pratama, B. A., & Sinulingga, A. (2021). Factors Inhibiting Sports Lecturer's Publication Productivity in International Journals. *Journal of Learning for Development*, 8(3), 568–581. https://doi.org/10.56059/jl4d.v8i3.522

Heng, K., Hamid, M. O., & Khan, A. (2020). Factors Influencing Academics' Research Engagement and Productivity: A Developing Countries Perspective. *Issues in Educational Research*, 30(3), 965–987. https://www.iier.org.au/iier30/heng- abs.html

Huda, N., Pawennei, I., Ratri, A., & Taylor, V. L. (2020). *Mendorong Perbaikan Ekosistem Riset dan Inovasi Indonesia*. https://www.ksi-indonesia.org/assets/uploads/original/2021/06/ksi-1623746540.pdf

Kaur, S. (2017). Sample Size Determination for Descriptive Study. *International Journal of Current Research*, 9(3), 48365–48367. Kubiatko, M. (2015). Why Should We Publish in Journals Indexed in WOS? *Journal of Baltic Science Education*, 14(2), 160–161. https://doi.org/10.33225/jbse/15.14.160

Kwiek, M. (2021). The Prestige Economy of Higher Education Journals: A Quantitative Approach. *Higher Education*, 81, 493– 519.

Memon, M. A., Ting, H., Cheah, J. H., Thurasamy, R., Chuah, F., & Cham, T. H. (2020). The sample size for survey research: Review and recommendations. *Journal of Applied Structural Equation Modeling*, 4(2), i–xx. https://doi.org/10.47263/jasem.4(2)01

Olujuwon, B. O., Amao-Taiwo, G. N., Ekpe-Iko, & Akudo, K. (2023). The challenges of high-impact research publishing in Africa: A case of Nigeria. *International Journal of Humanities Technology and Civilization, 8*(1), 7–16. https://doi.org/10.15282/ijhtc.v8i1.9392

Orduna-Malea, E., Aytac, S., & Tran, C. Y. (2019). Universities through the Eyes of Bibliographic Databases: a Retroactive Growth Comparison of Google Scholar, Scopus and WOS. *Scientometrics*, 121(1), 433–450. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-019-03208-7

Paltridge, B., & Starfield, S. (2023). The PhD by Publication in the Humanities and Social Sciences: a cross country Analysis. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 47(7), 863–874. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2023.2190450

Pho, P. D., & Tran, T. M. P. (2016). Obstacles to Scholarly Publishing in the Social Sciences and Humanities: A Case Study of Vietnamese Scholars. *Publications*, 4(3). https://doi.org/10.3390/publications4030019

Phoocharoensil, S. (2022). ELT and AL Research Trends in Thai SCOPUS-Indexed Journals. *PASAA*, 64(December), 163–193. Pilar, M. D. (2012). Getting Research Published Internationally in English: An Ethnographic Account of a Team of Finance Spanish Scholars. Struggles. *Ibérica 24,* 24, 139–155.

Polas, M. R. H. (2024). Publish or Perish! Challenges and Strategies in Publishing Research Papers in Top Tier Academic Journals. *Journal of Business & Management*, 2(1), 11–22. https://doi.org/10.47747/jbm.v2i1.1593

Pranckutė, R. (2021). WOS (WOS) and Scopus: The Titans of Bibliographic Information in Today's Academic World. *Publications*, 9(1). https://doi.org/10.3390/publications9010012

Purnell, P. J. (2019). *The effect of the Indonesian higher education evaluation system on conference proceedings publications*. 1–26. http://arxiv.org/abs/1910.12018

Purwanto, A., Ardiyanto, J., & Sudargini, Y. (2021). Inhibiting factors for publishing in reputable international journals among doctoral students: An exploratory mixed method study. *Journal of Industrial Engineering & Management Research (Jiemar)*, 2(2), 1–20.

Rawat, S., & Meena, S. (2014). Publish or Perish: Where Are We Heading? *Journal of Research in Medical Sciences*, 19(2), 87– 89.

Solomon, D., & Bjork, B. (2016). Article Processing Charges for Open Access Publication — the Situation for Research Intensive Universities in the USA and Canada. *PeerJ*, 4(e2264), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.2264

Sovacool, B. K., Axsen, J., Delina, L. L., Boudet, H. S., Rai, V., Sidortsov, R., Churchill, S. A., Jenkins, K. E. H., & Galvin, R. (2022). Towards Codes of Practice for Navigating the Academic Peer Review Process. *Energy Research and Social Science*, 89(June), 102675. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2022.102675

Sugiyono. (2016). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif. dan R&D*. Alfabeta C V Bandung.

Suiter, A. M., & Sarli, C. C. (2019). Selecting a Journal for Publication: Criteria to Consider. *Missouri Medicine*, 116(6), 461– 465.

Teixeira da Silva, J. (2021). Challenges that Early Career Researchers Face in Academic Research and Publishing. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 9(1), 77–106. https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v9i1.882

Teka, F., Habtamu, A., Najib, A. H., & Gemechu, F. (2017). Publication Productivity of Academics in Jigjiga University, Ethiopia. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 12(9), 559–568. https://doi.org/10.5897/err2017.3221 Thrower, P. (2012). Eight Reasons I Rejected Your Article. *Elsevier.Com*, 1–5.

Turner, D. P. (2019). Sampling Methods in Research Design. *Headache*, 90, 8–12. https://doi.org/10.1111/head.13707

Warren, J. R. (2018). How Much Do You Have to Publish to Get a Job in a Top Sociology Department? Or to Get Tenure? Trends over a Generation. *Sociological Science*, 6(February), 172–196. https://doi.org/10.15195/v6.a7

Yeon, A. L. (2021). An Overview of High-Impact Law Journals in Asian Countries. *UUM Journal of Legal Studies*, 12(2), 253–282. https://doi.org/10.32890/UUMJLS2021.12.2.11

Yin, R. K. (2016). *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*. The Guilford Press.

Youvan, D. C. (2024). *The Role of AI in Revolutionizing Academic Publishing and Knowledge Dissemination. January*. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.35215.76962