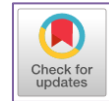


## The practice of postgraduate students' publication: A qualitative analysis on the students' publication challenges



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Receipt: 28 December 2025; Revision: 31 January 2026; Accepted: 1 March 2026

**Abstract:** Scientific publication in reputable international journals is a key requirement for the graduation of postgraduate students in Indonesia. Although this policy aims to enhance research quality, many students face challenges in fulfilling these requirements. This study aims to explore the scientific publication practices of postgraduate students and identify the difficulties they encounter in the publication process. The research method employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. Data were collected through participatory observation and in-depth interviews with postgraduate students selected using purposive sampling, and analyzed using ATLAS.ti 22 software. The findings reveal that the requirement to publish in Scopus-indexed journals with a minimum Q3 rating, as well as the obligation to include the supervisor and co-supervisor as authors, presents significant challenges for students. The difficulties faced include structuring articles properly, developing the research gap, determining the novelty of the research, and using appropriate academic language. The implications of these findings highlight the importance of more intensive support from higher education institutions in providing technical and pedagogical guidance to help students overcome these challenges and better prepare them to meet international publication standards.

**Keywords:** scientific publication; postgraduate students; higher education; reputable international journals; academic writing

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## INTRODUCTION

The publication of students' scholarly work has become a mandatory requirement for all higher education institutions in Indonesia. This policy is based on the Circular Letter of the Directorate General of Higher Education (Ditjen Dikti), Ministry of Education and Culture No. 152/E/T/2012 concerning the Publication of Scholarly Work for Undergraduate, Master's, and Doctoral Programs. Subsequently, the Directorate General of Learning and Student Affairs (Dirjen Belmawa), Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education, issued Circular Letter No. B/323/B.B1/SE/2019

dated May 31, 2019, followed by Circular Letter No. B/565/B.B1/HK.01.01/2019 dated July 8, 2019, regarding Facilities for the Publication of Students' Scholarly Work. These circular letters require students to publish scientific journal articles in national journals, accredited journals, international journals, and/or reputable international journals. The issuance of these policies has been motivated by the fact that Indonesia's publication output has significantly lagged behind that of neighboring countries, namely Malaysia and Thailand (Lukman et al., 2017).

Higher education institutions, as reflections of the overall education quality, must be capable of producing high-quality human resources in order to enhance a nation's development and competitiveness (Bjork et al., 2015; Butin, 2010; Chaffee & Sherr, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016; Marginson, 2016; Salam et al., 2017; Shahjahan & Kezar, 2013). One of the primary strategies through which universities, via their academic communities, contribute to national quality improvement is performing scientific publication. Policies aimed at increasing publication output also influence universities' positions in global rankings. According to QS University Rankings (2021), the top three universities worldwide are dominated by institutions from the United States, namely Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Stanford University, and Harvard University. Meanwhile, the top three universities in Indonesia are Universitas Gadjah Mada (ranked 254), Universitas Indonesia (305), and Institut Teknologi Bandung (313). These rankings are determined in part by one of the primary indicators of the QS World University Rankings, namely citations per academic paper (Sowter et al., 2017).

In relation to these rankings, awareness of the importance toward academic writing and publication among students has long become a trend in universities worldwide. In Mexico, undergraduate students are required to transform their final projects into journal articles (Ford & Newmark, 2011). Similarly, in China, various initiatives have been implemented to enhance students' publication output (Cargill et al., 2018; Li, 2016; Li et al., 2018). In Peru, students are invited to participate in research projects (Murray & Matsuno, 2014), while Colombia encourages publication beginning at the undergraduate level (Pulido-Medina et al., 2017). In Indonesia, although publication trends have begun to increase, the country still lags behind many Asian universities in terms of journal quality, citation impact, and the performance of top-ranked institutions (Pratama, 2025; Sebayang & Yunita, 2023; Sukoco et al., 2023).

Various initiatives have been undertaken by universities in Indonesia to enhance students' scientific publication output in line with policies issued by the Directorate General of Learning and Student Affairs (Dirjen Belmawa). These policies have thus mandated the publication of scholarly work as a graduation requirement. Then, these efforts include the introduction of publication support systems such as the *Open Journal System (OJS)* (E. Astuti & Isharijadi, 2019; Septian et al., 2021), the formulation of institutional strategic plans (Sugilar et al., 2019), the training in citation techniques and reference searching (Fernandez et al., 2020), and the reinforcement of thesis supervisors' role (Ismail et al., 2011). Despite these measures to support publication policies, many students continue to encounter obstacles in the publication process. Research by Purwanto et al. (2020) revealed that postgraduate students at private universities in Jakarta experienced various challenges, including limited funding, time constraints, and difficulties in locating relevant references and utilizing supporting software tools. Additional factors identified include limited access to reputable

international journals and the relatively lengthy publication process. Furthermore, Pardjono et al. (2017) reported that professional commitments, high publication costs, and restricted subscriptions to print and online journals hindered the publication productivity of postgraduate students at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta. Although universities have implemented numerous initiatives, these constraints continue to impede the smooth progression of the publication process.

This study differs from the previous ones in that it not only identifies the obstacles experienced by postgraduate students but also explores in depth the scientific publication practices they employ as well as the specific factors influencing their difficulties in fulfilling graduation requirements. Adopting a broader perspective, this study aims to examine how institutional support can more effectively address these barriers and how postgraduate students can strengthen their capacity to meet the challenges of international scholarly publication. Although prior studies have identified various constraints, no research to date has comprehensively investigated the practical dimensions of publication among postgraduate students, including the factors that affect their ability to satisfy international publication standards.

Through a comprehensive methodological design, this study focuses on postgraduate students who are required to publish in reputable international journals, particularly those indexed in Scopus. Drawing on the gaps identified in previous research, this study seeks to further explore the publication practices adopted by postgraduate students, identify the difficulties they encounter, and examine the factors contributing to these challenges. Accordingly, the primary objective of this article is to enrich the scholarly discourse on scientific publication among postgraduate students in Indonesia and to contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors that hinder timely graduation through publication. The central research question addressed in this study is: How do postgraduate students in Indonesia engage in publication practices and what challenges do they face in meeting graduation requirements?

## **METHOD**

This study was conducted in accordance with established guidelines for responsible research practice, as stipulated in Peraturan Kepala Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia (LIPI) Nomor 5 Tahun 2014 Tentang Kode Etika Publikasi Ilmiah (2014) and in alignment with the principles set forth by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (1999).

### **Research design**

This study employed a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach. Several studies using the phenomenological approach have examined various student-related phenomena, including students' difficulties in learning statistics (Blegur, 2020), student support in the process of undergraduate thesis preparation (T. P. Astuti & Hartati, 2013), the phenomenon of student dropouts (Bülbül, 2012), and the obstacles experienced by junior high school mathematics teachers in implementing a new curriculum (Retnawati, 2015).

### **Participant and data collection**

The participants in this study were postgraduate program students in Indonesia. In phenomenological studies, there is no definitive consensus regarding the minimum number of participants; however, a range of 3–10 participants is commonly considered

acceptable (Dukes, 1984; Sharma et al., 2024). The number of subjects in phenomenological research depends on several factors, including the level of commitment in the analysis and reporting process, the richness of the data obtained, and the constraints encountered during the study (Eatough & Smith, 2008).

To obtain diverse perspectives and experiences, this study employed a purposive sampling technique, which is appropriate when the selected units (e.g., sites, settings, organizations, or individuals) are capable of providing relevant and information-rich data to address the research questions (Bryman, 2016; Patton, 1990). The selection of respondents through purposive sampling was based on the following criteria: (1) postgraduate students enrolled at universities in Indonesia; and (2) postgraduate students who were either currently active in their studies or had recently completed their postgraduate coursework.

The data collection techniques employed in this study included participatory observation and interviews. The researcher conducted interviews with respondents, allowing them to choose the time and location of the interview. Data were collected between February and May 2022 after obtaining approval from the relevant organizations and the respondents. The process involved five semi-structured interviews with five key respondents, each lasting approximately 30–60 minutes and recorded for documentation purposes. The interview guide was developed based on the objectives of the study and relevant literature, and it was subsequently refined to ensure its appropriateness for data collection.

For the interview guide and the interview sessions, the researchers relied on the use of Bahasa Indonesia. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and subsequently transferred to ATLAS.ti 22. The data were password-protected and securely stored in a manner that allowed access only to the research team when connected to the private data storage system. All data were handled confidentially to ensure that no unauthorized individuals could access the data, and they are presented here in a form that prevents any potential harm to the respondents.

### **Data Analysis**

The interviews, which constitute the primary data for this article, were coded, thematically categorized, interpreted, and analyzed using ATLAS.ti 22. The stages of data analysis included: data collection, data input, selecting relevant data by creating quotations, labeling the data with appropriate codes (coding), and conducting data analysis through network knowledge to examine the interrelationships among the coded data so that a structured narrative of the report could be developed (Afriansyah, 2016).

The researcher informed all participants that all data obtained would be used solely for research purposes and would remain confidential, including their identities. All data recorded in the questionnaire were kept strictly confidential and would not be used for any purpose other than this research. For the interview participants, the researcher first requested the permission to record the interview, and all recordings were treated as confidential. The researcher also assured the participants that the information they provided would not affect their future circumstances. To ensure the credibility of the findings, the researchers emailed the draft manuscript to the respondents and invited their feedback.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Strict Publication Policies

Strict publication policies in Indonesian higher education have been implemented through several circular letters issued by the Directorate General of Higher Education (*Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi/Ditjen Dikti*) and the Directorate General of Learning and Student Affairs (*Direktorat Jenderal Pembelajaran dan Kemahasiswaan/Dirjen Belmawa*). Circular Letter No. 152/E/T/2012 concerning the Publication of Scientific Works for Undergraduate, Master’s, and Doctoral Programs has marked the beginning of the obligation for students to publish scientific work. The subsequent circular letters, namely No. B/323/B.B1/SE/2019 and No. B/565/B.B1/HK.01.01/2019, has thus further reinforced the requirement for students to publish scientific journal articles in national journals, accredited journals, and reputable international journals. Higher education institutions in Indonesia implement varying policies regarding this requirement; some exceed, match, or even fall below the standards established by *Dikti*. Several universities even require students to publish at least one article in a reputable international journal indexed in Scopus as a graduation requirement, which also influences the structure of academic curricula. As a consequence, many courses require students to complete assignments in the form of journal articles, which function as part of a publication preparation strategy for students seeking to fulfill graduation requirements. However, this obligation also becomes a major challenge for postgraduate students nearing graduation, as publishing an article in an international journal indexed in Scopus demands substantial effort and a very high standard of research quality.

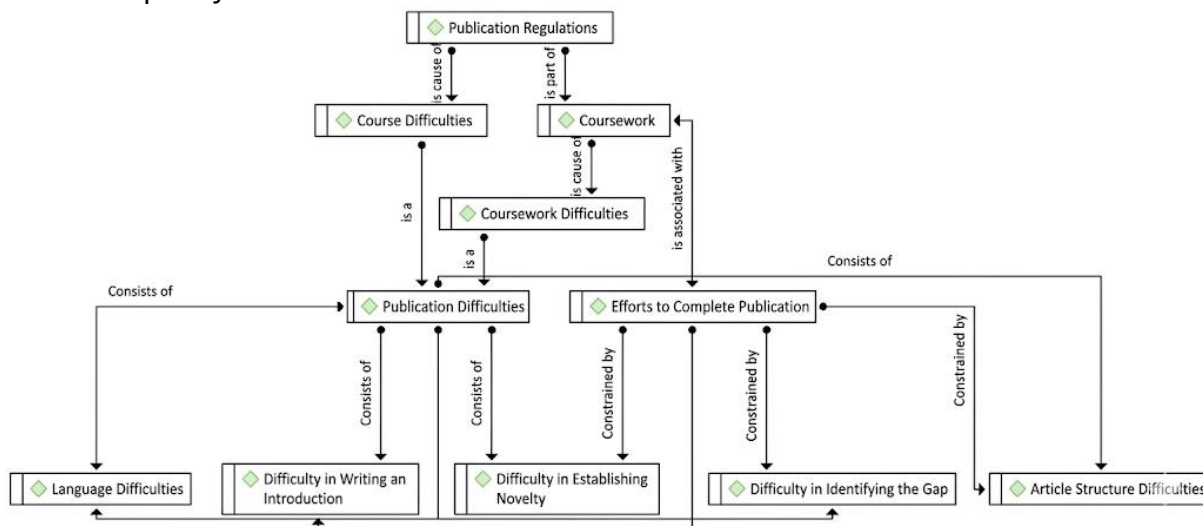


Figure 1. Network of Journal Publication Issues

Quality Journal Standards

The obligation to publish scientific work applies to lecturers, researchers, and final-year students as one of the requirements for their graduation. Students have the opportunity to publish in international journals and can contribute to the advancement of knowledge through mentoring, training, and collaborative research with their academic supervisors. However, many students still perceive writing a scientific journal article as a daunting task; consequently, they tend to avoid it and are reluctant to participate in research projects. In fact, journal publication offers various benefits for students. The

importance of reputable publications for students lies not only in fulfilling academic prerequisites but also in contributing to the future development of Indonesia. Furthermore, the publication of scientific journal articles serves as primary evidence of the originality of the research conducted and may also constitute a requirement for graduation.

The publication challenges experienced by students largely stem from regulations established by their respective universities. Based on the interviews that have been conducted, the students reported concerns regarding additional requirements imposed either by their university or by their academic programs. Several of these additional regulations are introduced with specific objectives. For instance, to fulfil the publication requirement, the students are required to publish their articles in journals indexed in Scopus with a minimum quartile ranking of Q3, and to list the primary supervisor as the second author and the co-supervisor as the third author. The participants' statements are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Quotation Content

ID	Quotation Content
4:11	Now, it's the regulation ... hmm ... the Ministry regulation has demanded us to do the publication. The requirement is intended to the students from undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate degree. In UNY alone, how is the publication regulation?
4:12	Well, the publication regulation in UNY is as follow. ... First, the publication should be in the international journal. This means that the students might opt for WOS, web of science, or Scopus.
4:13	The scheme that the students should display is Q3 at least.
4:14	Scopus Q3
4:15	But, the scheme that the student displays ... indeed, Scopus Q3 ... the scheme might be automatically stated from the study program ... verbally instead of officially Scopus Q3. That's it. The second one, hmm, in addition to the Quality Journal or the Scopus, we should quote ... I'm sorry ... the name of our lecture ... oh, I'm sorry ... I mean the name of the promotor and the co-promotor.
4:16	Right, the name of the promotor and the co-promotor. So, we will be the first author ... the student will be the first author. Then, the promotor will be the second author and the co-promotor will be the third author. That is the obligation.
4:17	Indeed. ... Those are the two urgent requirements. That's what I am talking about.
4:18	That's it! ... Pertaining to the thesis defense requirement or the judiciary, at least we should fulfil one of the requirements. But, if you don't want to have open defense, then you have to fulfil the two requirements or at least the two requirements. I guess that's all.
4:19	So, there is only one mandatory requirement, isn't there? Then, we also need to quote the name of the promotor and the co-promotor and the journal should be Scopus Q3.
4:45	At least Q3.
4:46	Quote the name of the promotor and the co-promotor.
4:47	We are the first author ... the students. The promotor will be the second author, and the co-promotor will be the third author.

### Factors that Cause the Difficulties Among the Students

The publication of scientific journal articles plays an important role for students as a platform for the scientific expression of their learning experiences, as well as an indicator of the scholar and intellectual quality within a country. Such publication also serves as a benchmark for the development of knowledge worldwide; the greater the number of high-quality scientific works published, the higher the credibility of a country's scientists and academics. Nevertheless, many students encounter difficulties in composing high-quality scientific work. One of the primary challenges faced by postgraduate students is the difficulty of organizing a well-structured scientific journal article that meets international standards. In addition, students often struggle to identify research gaps, articulate the novelty of their studies, and compose manuscripts using precise and clear language. These challenges further complicate their publication

process, which should otherwise represent an important step in contributing to the advancement of global knowledge. These difficulties can be observed in the networks presented in Figure 2.

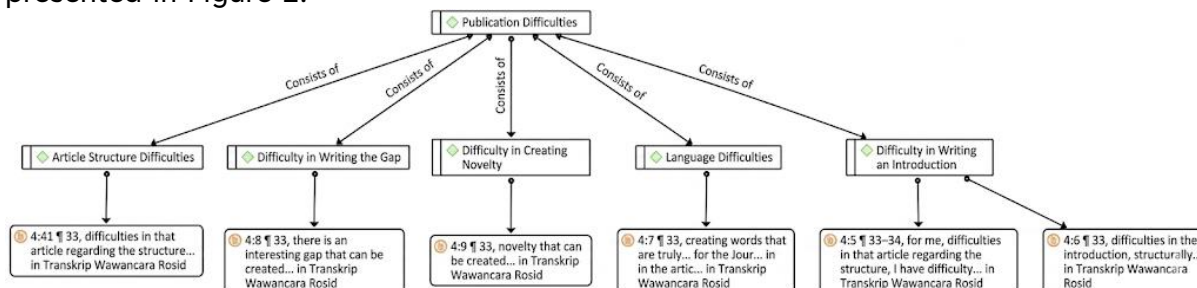


Figure 2. Networks mengenai Faktor Kesulitan Publikasi

## Discussions

The findings of this study indicate that the difficulties experienced by postgraduate students in fulfilling the requirement to publish in reputable international journals constitute a systemic phenomenon. The systemic phenomenon has arisen from the interaction between institutional policies, advanced academic literacy capacity, and psychological dynamics that develop within the academic culture of higher education. These findings suggest that the challenges within students' publication cannot be reduced to merely individual issues; rather, they represent consequences of the structural and pedagogical configurations that shape the experience of postgraduate study.

Based on the findings of this study, internal publication policies that exceed national regulations, particularly the requirement to publish in reputable journals as an academic prerequisite—emerge as a primary source of pressure for students. Such policies function not only as instruments of quality control but also as high-stakes evaluation mechanisms that directly determine the graduation outcomes among the students. Research based on the experiences of postgraduate students indicates that publication requirements as a condition for graduation are often perceived as a dominant academic burden and may potentially disrupt the focus on the development of the research itself (Shamsi & Osam, 2022).

In the context of higher education, the pressures caused by such policy have been criticized for tending to shift the orientation of learning from the process of developing scientific capacity toward the fulfilment of administrative targets. Qualitative studies based on the experiences of postgraduate students indicate that demands for academic output without adequate pedagogical support widen the gap between institutional expectations and students' epistemic readiness (Richardson, 2000). This condition helps explain why stringent publication policies often do not align with the actual realities behind the academic writing competencies of the students.

These structural pressures interact with students' limitations in advanced academic literacy, particularly in constructing scientific arguments, developing a *research gap*, and formulating the theoretical contributions expected by reputable international journals. Research on postgraduate writing trajectories indicates that writing a scientific article is not merely a technical skill but rather an epistemic practice that develops gradually through supervision, scholarly dialogue, and repeated experience (Gimenez et al., 2024). When this learning process is not systematically facilitated, students tend to be stagnant in the development of their scientific writing.

Furthermore, the open-access literature on academic literacy emphasizes that students' publication failures often stem from implicit and assumptive writing instruction. In this kind of situation, students are expected to "already be able" to write according to international standards without explicit instruction regarding academic discursive practices (Wingate & Tribble, 2012). Although this research has been conducted within the broader context of higher education, the research has particularly strong relevance in explaining the difficulties faced by postgraduate students who are confronted with global publication standards.

The interaction between policy pressures and academic literacy limitations subsequently gives rise to psychological dynamics that further intensify students' publication difficulties. Students tend to perceive publication as a high-risk evaluative arena, which triggers academic anxiety and fosters a tendency to avoid both the writing process and the submission of manuscripts. Empirical survey-based studies indicate that high levels of academic pressure are correlated with increased learning anxiety and decreased academic self-confidence among postgraduate students (Salmela-Aro et al., 2018).

Other studies focusing on postgraduate student well-being also indicate that structural pressures in postgraduate education, including demands for academic productivity, contribute to chronic stress and academic burnout (Levecque et al., 2017). These findings reinforce the analysis that publication difficulties are not solely cognitive and technical in nature but are also closely associated with students' psychological conditions within a competitive academic ecosystem.

A potential counterargument to these findings may arise from the view that high publication standards are necessary to maintain academic quality and institutional reputation. However, open-access research examining postgraduate writing and supervision practices indicates that high standards are more effective when combined with pedagogical approaches based on mentoring, scaffolding, and the gradual development of writing capacity (Aitchison, 2009). Without such approach, publication pressure may instead undermine the objective of improving academic quality.

Thus, the findings of this study affirm that the publication difficulties experienced by postgraduate students constitute a systemic consequence of the misalignment between academic policies, scientific literacy readiness, and pedagogical as well as psychological support available within postgraduate education. These findings explicitly address the objective of the study to identify the sources of students' publication challenges, while also providing an empirical basis for the need to reform publication policies toward a stronger orientation on the research learning process and the academic sustainability of postgraduate students.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This study reveals that the difficulties experienced by postgraduate students in fulfilling the requirement to publish in reputable international journals constitute a systemic phenomenon influenced by stringent publication policies, academic literacy limitations, and psychological dynamics of the students. The policy requiring the publication in Scopus-indexed journals with minimum quartile ranking Q3, as well as the inclusion of the primary supervisor and co-supervisor as co-authors, placed substantial pressure on students, which often disrupts their focus on the development of their research. This situation exacerbates their difficulties in organizing the structure of

scientific articles, identifying research gaps, and articulating the novelty of their studies. The implications of these findings highlight the need for reform in publication policies that place greater emphasis on the research learning process and the supervision quality, rather than solely on final outputs. In addition, more intensive pedagogical support and psychological support to address academic anxiety are essential in enabling students to better cope with academic pressures. Strengthening collaboration between lecturers and students is also necessary to facilitate more effective supervision in the process of writing scientific journal articles.

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