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Applying the concept of *rahmatan lil alamin* in publication

A transdisciplinary perspective on scientific publication literacy and practices in Indonesian universities

The obligation to write scientific papers published in reputable international journals has become a source of pressure for most of the academic community in Indonesia, especially for those seeking promotions. This article aims to provide insight into how the concept of *rahmatan lil alamin*, one of the Islamic values, can be used as a basis for understanding and acceptance of these obligations, with or without government regulation.

The *rahmatan lil alamin* derives from Quranic verse that means that God sent Muhammad (the Moslem prophet) as a mercy to all the worlds, the worlds of mankind. As Muhammad's followers, Moslems must do good deeds for the benefit of all humans. The four values of mercy according to *rahmatan lil alamin*—rationality; intelligence; balance between heart, reason, and work; and comprehensive values—may also be applied to academic publication. Rather than the “publish or perish” model, applying this Islamic principle conceptualizes publishing as one of the highest forms of self-actualization in the academic world.

Background

The lecturers' debate in Indonesia regarding the obligation to publish scientific papers in reputable indexed international journals has become a perpetual polemic in various communities, especially on social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook.¹ In Indonesia, the

Ministry of Education and Culture regulates the Operational Guidelines for Credit Points Assessment for Academic Promotion or Lecturer Rank.² It regulates credit points that must be fulfilled by lecturers in order to advance their career positions, which puts pressure on most lecturers in the country. An academic who writes scientific papers and is published in international journals with a high impact factor will be rewarded with promising career advancements and even lucrative financial support.³ It is an implemented policy in some developing countries that articles not published in journals indexed in the *Journal Citation Report* will be considered less relevant.

Only authors who have adopted the “academically correct” mindset will accept the requirement to publish articles in journals that have high impact factors—they act and plan to advance their academic careers. Meanwhile, professional researchers who ignore the impact factor policy will automatically be marginalized, isolated, lack recognition, and be institutionally neglected.⁴ Therefore, various forms of malpractice in the research and publication processes occur to find shortcuts. “There is no question

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that the pressures built up in the system are having a corrosive effect on the output from scientific labs.”⁵ These pressures also have a detrimental effect on the validity and credibility of medical science with potentially fatal consequences, if authors fabricate or falsify data, for example.⁶

The goal of writing scientific papers and publications has shifted from disseminating knowledge to becoming a business, where monetary gain is a primary goal. Those who have limited skills in academic writing and publishing may be inclined to pay someone else to publish on their behalf. In addition to the cost of writing, those authors still have to pay submission fees, which may be in addition to any article processing charges (APC) at the journal. As a result, the authors may engage in inappropriate behavior.

The purpose of writing should be returned to its origin, where it was not pressured by government regulations, the university obligation, journal editors, funders, and others to jointly formulate new policies.⁷ This is especially true in the Indonesian context, where the government requires those who achieve the highest academic rank (professor) to have articles published in journals with a particular SCImago Journal Rank (SJR).

This article aims to brainstorm reasons for publishing in international scientific journals indexed in trusted and recognized large databases, such as MedLine, PubMed, EMBASE, SCOPUS, EBSCO Publishing's Electronic Databases, SCIRUS, Web of Science, or Atlantic Press. I would like to provide a perspective on Islamic values, which are the basis for understanding the regulations regarding the obligation to publish scientific papers for researchers and lecturers, as mentioned above.

Moslem professionals must not take the regulation to publish in international journals as a source of pressure. Instead, they must take it as an opportunity to contribute intellectually to the global community, as an application of mercy for humanity. In order to do so, authors must follow the rules and standards in writing and consider the ethics in publishing. This is the application of rationality and intelligence in writing scientific articles to be internationally accepted. Any unethical conduct such as fabrication or falsification of research data for publication must be avoided. Authors must commit to research integrity by balancing between intellect, skill, and morals for the community's sake.

Dynamics of knowledge and information literacy skills of the academic community

The fact is that publishing scientific articles in reputable international journals is still a major challenge and adds to the “academic burden” borne by most lecturers. This issue is a hot topic of discussion among academics, especially in Indonesia. The various obstacles faced by Indonesian researchers, which range from weak scientific writing skills to the publication process and journals, are expressed in more detail below:

- lack of skills in expressing ideas and arranging them systematically in written works;
- lack of knowledge and skills in finding reference sources to support the theory;
- lack of tools utilization that helps create citations and references, such as Mendeley, Zotero, or other reference managers;
- lack of skill to use publishing systems to submit articles electronically;
- lack of understanding of journal submission mechanisms and standards, as reputable international journals generally have different mechanisms;
- lack of experience with editing and review process;
- lack of understanding about the code of publication ethics;
- lack of time to write; and
- feeling disappointed and discouraged when their article is rejected or declined.

These obstacles result in the low number of scientific publications by Indonesian academics in international venues. Although some Indonesian academics publish articles internationally, many are trapped into publishing in predatory journals by the promise of fast publication, but they experience costly consequences. Their works do not go through a review process and/or the journal does not follow an accepted publication code of ethics.⁸ This situation implies that the level of academic publishing literacy in the academic community lecturers, researchers, and students is low.

The obstacles generally faced in writing scientific papers include lack of confidence, difficulties identifying and developing published ideas, selecting appropriate journals, and unfamiliarity in the publishing process.⁹ In addition to these

challenges, the publication of scientific papers should be understood as an individual's obligation to disseminate their knowledge to provide maximum benefit to the global community. This is the meaning of the *rahmatan lil alamin* concept in Islamic teachings. By publishing articles in openly and widely accessible journals, authors can contribute scientifically to the world.

Publishing in world-recognized journals is the highest form of self-actualization in the academic world. Self-actualization is the highest form of freedom of self-expression and is the adaptive behavior of sharing knowledge and equality with others.¹⁰ Moreover, producing intellectual work is a part of ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.¹¹

Rahmatan lil alamin as the basis for scientific publications

The concept of *rahmatan lil alamin* in Islam means to "provide grace to all mankind and the environment." This concept was taken from al-Qur'an surah al-Anbiya '(21) verse 107, which states that Islam is a religion that brings goodness to all mankind and the universe.¹² People who believe in this teaching will create beneficial works that will guarantee the safety and peace of mankind. This is in opposition to the creation and publication of misleading or unethical works.

There are four values from the concept of *rahmatan lil alamin* that can be implemented in the publication of scientific papers. First, the value of rationality, where all forms of writing must be accepted by reason and their usefulness can be felt.

Second, the value of intelligence, which is the intellectual ability to draw conclusions and synthesize published papers so that they can be applied in life.

Third, the value of balance between the heart, in the form of spirituality and morals; reason or intellectual insight; and work or technical ability—all are integrated into a published scientific work.¹³ This means that writing a scientific paper for publication

not only uses critical thinking and writing skills, but it must also conform with ethics or morals.

Fourth is comprehensive value, in which the content of a published scientific work is aimed at maintaining and disseminating one's intellectual property for mankind's benefit. This means that a wider opportunity for access to a written work will have a broader and larger impact on the benefits for mankind.

If the basis of scientific publications is *rahmatan lil alamin*, the writing process must apply the principles of honesty to produce true and reliable scientific findings.

The concept of *rahmatan lil alamin* in scientific publications is indicated by the citation impact or the relative number of citations received by an article.¹⁴ To increase the impact quantity, which means increasing the usefulness of an article for the public interest, the paper should be published in a journal incorporated or indexed in a large and trusted database, where it will be easily discoverable. Publishing articles in journals registered with the local indexing institute do not cause problems.

In Indonesia, for example, several indexing databases developed include MORAREF,¹⁵ SINTA,¹⁶ Garuda,¹⁷ and Indonesia One-Search.¹⁸ However, publishing articles in nationally indexed journals using only a particular country's language will make their usefulness limited only to the nation's scope. Therefore, to apply the principle of *rahmatan lil alamin* to intellectual works, researchers need to publish their work in internationally indexed journals based on scientific principles and to comply with ethical writing and research standards.

Conclusion

This article emphasizes the importance of publishing scientific articles in internationally indexed journal databases to provide broad benefits to mankind. Writing and publishing works is a form of self-actualization, which is the highest level in the hierarchy of human needs in Maslow's theory.¹⁹

Authors should be interested in disseminating their intellectual work to the wider community and should be proud if they can contribute their beneficial ideas to many people without geographical boundaries. According to Islamic values, the best man in the world is one who is most beneficial for others. The contribution of Islamic values in this scientific publication is universal and can be used by anyone, both Muslim and non-Muslim.

Notes

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