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Indonesian performance-related funding system ‘open to abuse’

Academics claim that loopholes in government index of top scholars raise questions over allocation of public money

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Indonesian academics are calling for an overhaul of the country’s research performance framework and the implementation of an “open research culture”, claiming that loopholes in the government scheme allow scholars to game the system.

The Science and Technology Index (Sinta) (<http://sinta2.ristekdikti.go.id/home>), which is run by the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education, ranks academics based on their research productivity and citation impact. Scholars are given 40 points for each paper in a journal indexed in the Scopus database, and additional points based on the number of citations and their h-index in Scopus and Google Scholar.

But Surya Darma Hamonangan, an international consultant at the Islamic University of North Sumatera, said that a group of some 20 researchers were being rewarded for publishing scores of papers in predatory journals or in conference proceedings that did not undergo a peer-review process.

Some of these questionable publications appeared in Elsevier’s Scopus database, while others that have been removed from the database were still included in the ministry’s list of Scopus-indexed publications, he said. Meanwhile, some conference proceedings were incorrectly listed as journals, which gives researchers more points in the framework, he added.

Dr Hamonangan, who is a member of the Indonesian Open Science Team – a group advocating for an open scientific culture in the country – said that some researchers also cited their own work excessively.

Researchers who achieve high scores in the index are rewarded with awards, additional funding and prestige, said Juneman Abraham, a member of the research and publication executive committee at the Indonesian Psychological Association.

According to the Sinta database, the top-ranked author received 1,064 citations through Google Scholar in 2018 and has published 93 papers this year, 42 of which were published in the same publication, which is sometimes listed as a journal and sometimes referenced as a proceeding. Another author published 50 papers in this publication and 79 overall in 2018.

Commented [R1]: Correction has been requested on Dec 24, 2018. It should be: **Mr**

Rizqy Amelia Zein, an early career researcher in the Faculty of Psychology at Airlangga University (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/airlangga-university>), who is also part of the Indonesian Open Science Team, said that an “open research culture”, in which researchers would be required to make all their material and research findings publicly available, would provide an “antidote to this corrupted system”.

“We believe that, if the Indonesian government would be willing to introduce a policy that [requires] researchers to adopt open scientific practice, researchers could be more attentive to improving their research quality,” she said, adding that the higher education ministry should “evaluate their grant recipients” based on whether applicants adhere to open scientific practice.

She also called for the ministry to “reduce its dependency on bibliometric criteria” because the practice can “encourage publication misconduct”.

The Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education did not respond to *Times Higher Education*’s request for a comment.

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