

# DO REPUTABLE JOURNALS PRIORITIZE CITATION CREDIBILITY? AN INVESTIGATION INTO ELT JOURNAL

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Predatory journals value financial issues rather than ethics (Beall, 2017) and annoying researchers with spam invitations for publication, lack of quality in publication process especially in peer review processes, which is claimed to be highly qualified, and article processing and/or publishing charges are among their common characteristics (Butler, 2013). Predatory journals are considered as a threat mainly for those who do not have enough expertise in publishing such as early career researchers and practitioners, mostly from developing countries (Demir, 2018). Any legitimate journal is expected to be careful about the credibility of the cited sources; yet, considering the aforementioned concerns, practitioner-oriented journals should be meticulous about not giving any room to citations by illegitimate publishers as their readership may not question the credibility of the sources cited (Ferris & Winker, 2017; Lalu et al., 2017). Tracking a source from a predatory publisher cited in a reputable journal might give the wrong impression about the legitimacy of publishers to those readers and may encourage them to collaborate with predatory publishers. In this vein, in an unexplored researched area of illegitimate journals, with an original methodology, this study aimed to examine the cited sources in the articles published in ELT Journal (Volume 75, Issues 1, 2, 3 and 4) in 2021. Volume 75 covered 70 articles with a total number of 790 reference entries. ELT Journal was chosen for this study since it is one of the most prominent journals in the field of English Language Teaching with its focus on daily issues of practitioners mostly from practitioners' points of view. Thus, ELT Journal, which has been published by Oxford University Press for over 75 years, appeals to a wide range of readership from practitioners to experienced

scholars for the exchange of information and is indexed by reputable databases such as 'Social Sciences Citation Index' (SSCI) and 'Arts & Humanities Citation Index' (AHCI), which paves the way for a broader audience. For this purpose, each reference entry in the target volume was first categorized according to the type of the publication (e.g., journal article, book, chapter in edited collections), and then was checked against the legitimacy of the publisher by using master lists of databases (e.g., Clarivate and Scopus). Considering the existence of possibly predatory journals in reputable databases, additional precautions were taken. Any suspicious source was subject to Beall's (2015) criteria for determining predatory open-access publishers.

As a result, eight categories and 11 indexes, 148 other resources such as webpages and daily newspapers were detected. Journal articles ( $f=359$ ) made up 45.44% of the cited sources whereas books and edited chapters in edited collections ( $f=360$ ) made up 45.57% of them. Considering the journal articles, 27.11% of them were indexed by SSCI and/or AHCI. Regarding the books and chapters, 18.42% of them were published by prominent publishers such as Oxford University Press ( $f=27$ ), Routledge ( $f=60$ ), Cambridge University Press ( $f=28$ ), and Palgrave Macmillan ( $f=25$ ).

The two researchers of this study detected two possibly predatory journals (PPJ1 and PPJ2). PPJ1, as a journal non-indexed by prominent indexes, met 30 of the criteria for poor journal and poor publisher standards. Furthermore, the publisher of the journal is listed in Beall's List of Potential Predatory Journals and Publishers. PPJ1 did not provide any information about their reviewers. The publisher stated that the publishing process was a 6-week-schedule; however, there is a fast-track option offering 1-

week-process costing \$750, increasing concerns regarding its legitimacy. PPJ2, again as a journal non-indexed by prominent indexes, and its publisher met 13 of the criteria for poor journal and poor publisher standards. Although the journal met relatively fewer criteria, its publisher is listed in Beall's List of Potential Predatory Journals and Publishers. The editorial board of the journal listed 75 scholars in addition to an associate editor. It was interesting to note that almost all board members were from developing countries. However, there were members claimed to be affiliated to the UK and US universities; yet a quick check of their Google Scholar profiles revealed that they were indeed affiliated to universities in developing countries. PPJ2 insufficiently explained their peer review process only with two sentences claiming double-blind peer-review was implemented. Several articles published in the journal were investigated and inconsistent and

improper referencing, punctuation mistakes, untidy paper format, and reference lists full of mistakes were observed as evidence of the illegitimacy of the journal.

Considering the existence of only two possibly predatory publishers in a total number of 790 reference entries, it is clear that ELT Journal is following good strategies to eliminate illegitimate publishers being cited in their articles. The results of the present study provide implications for the importance of having well-developed review policies for academic publishers, especially those who are targeting early career researchers and practitioners among their readerships. Authors are responsible for the credibility of the sources they are citing; thus, they should be selective and inquisitive concerning their citations. However, publishers are also expected to guide their prospective authors to ensure the credibility of sources.

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