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Assessing Academics' Awareness of Predatory Publishing Practices Among Researchers at Ardhi University, Tanzania

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Abstract.

The emergence of predatory publishing practices poses a significant threat to the credibility of scholarly communication, especially in developing countries. This study evaluated the awareness and understanding of predatory publishing among the academic staff at Ardhi University in Tanzania. The study employed a descriptive research design, and using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through questionnaire from 125 randomly selected participants and 7 interviews conducted with the professors, deans and directors including the library director and the director of post graduate research and publication. The findings revealed that while 86% of academics acknowledged the existence of predatory journals, only 29.6% demonstrated a strong understanding of the practices associated with these journals. Respondents identified key characteristics of predatory publishing, including the absence of peer review, misleading editorial claims, and fake indexing. Academics primarily assessed journals based on peer review processes, the reputation of the editorial board, and indexing status. The findings underscore the need for institutional interventions to increase awareness, enhance research integrity, and promote ethical publishing practices. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on safeguarding academic quality in Tanzanian higher education by fostering informed decision-making regarding publishing.

Keywords: Predatory publishing, Predatory journal, Open Access, Scholarly communication, Publishing ethics.

Introduction

The advent of the internet and advancements in digital technologies have revolutionized the processes of generating, publishing, and disseminating scholarly information (Koerber et al., 2023; Thistlethwaite, 2016; Varsha & Srinivasaragavan, 2025). These innovations have allowed researchers to share their findings more quickly and widely with both academic communities and the general public (HADJAB & Omrani, 2025; Varsha & Srinivasaragavan, 2025). The traditional subscription-based publishing models have gradually evolved in such as a way that many mainstream publishers now provide parallel electronic versions of their journals to cater to the needs of a digitally connected academic audience (Kayyali, 2024). Based on this development, Open Access (OA) publishing model emerged to enhance access, sharing and dissemination of scholarly content. Open access publishing enhances the visibility

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and potential impact of their research output, as it can be easily accessible and utilized by researchers. In this case, open access has created new opportunities for disseminating research output to the public. While OA promotes the widespread dissemination of knowledge, it has simultaneously facilitated the rise of predatory publishing, a phenomenon that threatens the integrity of the scholarly communication (Moshi et al., 2025a, 2025b).

Predatory publishers uses gold open access route, where authors pay publication fees to make their work freely accessible online (Taylor, 2021). It has brought challenges, including concern about the quality control mechanisms of the publications as well as publishing ethics. The rapid expansion of digital publishing has facilitated the rise of predatory publishing which compromises research integrity by bypassing rigorous peer-review standards (Lorenzo et al., 2025). Predatory publishers tend to exploit the pressure to publish, particularly in academic environments where institutional policies and procedures for verifying journal legitimacy remain weak (Bairi et al., 2023; Moshi et al., 2025). Literature has indicated that despite the fact that researchers understand the risks of engaging in predatory publishing, institutional pressures and lack of knowledge among academics in higher learning institutions still prevail (Moshi et al., 2025). On the other hand, many academics possess very low capacity in recognizing fake journals, as an indication that there is a significant knowledge gap in this aspect (Keane, 2025; Moshi et al., 2025). Consequently, some predatory entities deliberately exploit these vulnerabilities by offering attractive publication timelines and superficial editorial processes that circumvent the rigorous scrutiny characteristic of established scholarly venues (Bagues et al., 2018; Buitrago & Bowker, 2020). This lack of knowledge is caused by lack the technical proficiency required to recognize legitimate journals from predatory ones (David et al., 2026).

Predatory publishers take advantage of the Open Access (OA) model by imposing high publication fees, known as article processing charges (APCs), while failing to deliver crucial editorial and publishing services (Bhasker & Solomon, 2024). This unethical practice undermines the quality, credibility, and trustworthiness of academic output, thereby eroding the foundation of scholarly communication (Dracula, 2025). The ongoing prevalence of these practices necessitates immediate action to safeguard academic integrity and uphold research excellence. This practice is becoming challenging especially to academics who are under significant pressure to maintain high publication volumes to secure funding or promotion (Talari & Ravindran, 2023). These predatory outlets further confuse the research landscape by disguising their lack of proper peer review, sometimes appearing even within reputable academic databases. Such visibility can falsely suggest that fraudulent or low-quality research is credible, making it difficult for scholars to distinguish between validated evidence and deceptive content. Consequently, this influx of unreliable work threatens to undermine trust in scientific communication and complicates efforts to conduct thorough, evidence-based literature reviews.

Researchers at various African educational institutions face challenges publishing scholarly work on open-access platforms due to insufficient familiarity with the practice and the perception that open-access resources lack the prestige or impact factors of traditional, established journals (Mubofu & Kainkwa, 2023). Research in Ghana and South Africa indicates that predatory publishing practices pose a significant impact to scholars in higher education institutions (Ferris & Winker, 2017). While all scholars may be susceptible to predatory publishers, young career researchers face a higher risk than experienced researchers (Salawu et al., 2025). Despite the growing concerns about PJs globally, predatory publishing incidents continue to be reported in developing countries like Tanzania, for example. Despite the growing concerns about PJs globally, predatory publishing incidents continue to be reported

in developing countries like Tanzania. Research across the University of Dodoma and Sokoine University of Agriculture indicates nearly 42% still engage in publishing through predatory journals; this is driven by intense institutional pressure (Moshi et al., 2025). Increased institutional pressure to publish may lead to poor publishing decisions, such as the submission of manuscriptssss in Predatoary journals (PJs) which lack standard publication procedures such as rigorous peer review.

Some interventions have been implemented in Tanzania to address the issue of predatory publishing. The Tanzanian government has initiated measures to address this issue via the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU), which has implemented tools and issued directives aimed at ensuring quality assurance in higher education, encompassing the assessment of publications and scholarly works (David et al., 2026; Moshi et al., 2025). Despite these interventions, authors from Tanzania are still susceptible to publishing in predatory journals due to a lack of awareness, repeated unsuccessful attempts, and insufficient confidence in publishing within reputable journals.

Although the impact of predatory publication on research integrity is generally felt in the Tanzanian scholarly communication ecosystem, there is limited empirical research on awareness and perception of predatory publishing. It is in this light that this research establishes researchers' knowledge of predatory journals with a view to shedding light on researchers' awareness of these types of journals and how to distinguish them from credible journals. This study strived to provide valuable insights that can inform further interventions and support mechanisms to protect academics from the detrimental effects of predatory publishing practices in higher learning institutions in Tanzania.

Study rationale

The proliferation of predatory publishing practices poses a significant threat to the integrity, credibility, and quality of scholarly communication globally (Jingura et al., 2023; Jordan, 2024). The scholarly literature indicates that predatory publishers often exploit the Open Access model by charging authors publication fees while failing to provide essential services such as peer review, editorial oversight, or indexing, which are hallmarks of legitimate publishing (Beall, 2013; Shen & Björk, 2015; Jordan, 2024). Although awareness of such practices is gradually increasing worldwide, academic communities in developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, remain particularly vulnerable (Ferris & Winker, 2017; Mvula, 2022). This practice undermines trust in the academic publishing process and jeopardizes the reputation of institutions whose staff inadvertently contribute to such journals.

Currently, there is limited empirical research examining Tanzanian academics' specific awareness and knowledge of PJs, and this exacerbates the issue. While countries in the region, such as Ghana and South Africa, have conducted studies on this issue, Tanzanian universities, including Ardhi University, lack the localized data needed to develop effective institutional strategies and national policies (Ferris & Winker, 2017; Shrestha, 2020). As highlighted in studies from other Tanzanian institutions, such as the University of Dar es Salaam, some researchers become victims of predatory journals due to factors like ignorance, lack of confidence, frequent manuscript rejections, and insufficient institutional support (Makulilo, 2021; Buhomoli & Muneja, 2020). The situation at Ardhi University remains unclear, how well academics understand predatory publishing, although there is growing concern that many academic staff members struggle to distinguish between legitimate and predatory journals.

Consequently, there is an urgent need to evaluate the existing levels of awareness among faculty members to identify specific knowledge gaps and design targeted training programs

To address this gap, the study sought to assess the awareness of predatory publishing practices among the academic staff at Ardhi University. The research aims to identify knowledge gaps, which will enhance institutional responses, inform national policy, and promote responsible and ethical scholarly communication in Tanzania's higher education sector. This study is guided by four research questions as follows: Are academics aware of predatory journals? Do academics have prior knowledge of predatory journals? Can academics identify various features of predatory journals? and what are the criteria do academics use in assessing the quality of journals?

Empirical studies on Awareness of Predatory Publishing

Several studies have been conducted to ascertain scholars' awareness about predatory publishing practices. These studies have revealed varying levels of awareness depending on the context of scholars' exposure to these practices (Moshi et al., 2025; Wali et al., 2025). For instance, research across diverse academic environments indicates that many faculty members struggle to accurately differentiate between reputable outlets and predatory platforms, often experiencing confusion that persists until targeted training interventions are implemented (Janen, 2024; Kinde, 2021). Awareness of predatory publishing practices among universities in developing nations, such as the Republic of Moldova, reveals that while many scholars recognize the term, their ability to identify predatory conferences and journals remains inconsistent across career stages(Cuciureanu et al., 2025).

Similarly, studies conducted in Zimbabwe have demonstrated that predatory publishing is prevalent across various academic schools, highlighting that even when researchers are aware of the phenomenon, they may still fall victim to unethical practices(Jingura et al., 2023). This lack of understanding is exacerbated by the mandate to publish for career progression and promotion, which often pressures authors into prioritizing speed over the rigorous scrutiny required to identify legitimate, peer-reviewed platforms (Lansana, 2025). Furthermore, survey findings in other regions demonstrate that even among professionals who express familiarity with the term "predatory journal," there is a persistent inability to correctly verify the authenticity of specific publications. This discrepancy often arises because predatory actors frequently adopt sophisticated strategies to camouflage their operations, which can deceive even experienced academics (Moshi et al., 2025).

Moreover, the absence of practical, universally accessible tools for journal assessment leaves scholars relying on subjective heuristics rather than objective validation (Kinde, 2021). Consequently, theoretical familiarity remains insufficient without the institutional provision of sustained, practical training that empowers researchers to critically evaluate editorial processes, peer-review integrity, and legitimate indexing databases before finalizing their submissions (Janen, 2024; Kinde, 2021).

Grgić & Guskić, (2019) investigated the awareness of predatory journals among scientists in Croatia. The research employed a descriptive research design and involved 90 participants, consisting of 56 academics from the social and scientific disciplines and 34 librarians. The information was collected through an online survey. The results suggest that while a majority of scientists recognize the existence of predatory publications, they may lack the necessary skills to discern them effectively. The finding of this study highlight the common limitation in

the literature, even in relatively well-resourced European institutions, awareness is frequently limited. This aligns with the findings of Danevska et al.,(2016) which underscore the necessity for heightened awareness and direction regarding the identification and avoidance of predatory publishers. Due to these limitations, many researchers turn to readily available sources that guarantee quick publication without strict requirements, even when the reliability of these sources is in doubt. The authors underscore that this vulnerability derives not only from a lack of awareness, but also from the attraction of quick publication and high acceptance rate, which contrast with the difficult and time-consuming processes of legitimate publishers.

Similarly, Atiso et al., (2019) conducted a study on predatory publishing in Ghana. The results indicated that most research scientists are aware of predatory journals and are often solicited by them, but are less aware of the tools available to determine the quality of specific publications. The findings of this research are significant because they reveal that research scientists may be more aware of predatory journals than previously expected, yet they may lack the training or tools necessary to ascertain whether a journal is legitimate. This study reveals the prevailing scenario common in various African contexts, while there is superficial awareness, the lack of practical tools and institutional guidance renders this awareness mainly ineffectual. The authors stressed the the need for an extended campaign to raise awareness about predatory publishers and strategies to avoid them. Furthermore, they proposed methods for identifying credible and ethical publishers to safeguard scholars from falling victim to deceptive publishing practices.

Generally, the reviewed articles provide thorough overview of researchers' awareness of PJs and explore the level of awareness of reseachers on the phoenomena in different academic contexts. However, there is still a significant gap of comprehensive empirical studies that particularly look at the underlying causes of Tanzanian university academics' engagement with predatory sites. Limited study examining how these pressures influence individual decision-making regarding publisher selection, despite the fact that researchers probably face difficulties akin to those encountered throughout the developing nations, such as limited research funding and institutional pressures that prioritize publication quantity over quality. This study seeks to address this gap by producing empirical evidence on the awareness of predatory journals in the Tanzanian contexts. Therefore, while the previous the current study evaluated the awareness of predatory publishing among the academic staff at Ardhi University in Tanzania.

Materials and Methods

This research employed a descriptive design. The design was chosen for its capacity to generate comprehensive information and facilitate the exploration of various dimensions of the research issue. This study employed a mixed-method research approach, enabling the researcher to validate their findings through the process of triangulation. The cohort for this investigation consisted of scholarly personnel engaged by Ardhi University (ARU). The university was deemed suitable for the study owing to its extensive history of over sixty years in providing education as a higher learning institution in Tanzania, having operated under various statuses.

ARU has shown a consistent trajectory of enhancement in scholarly research and publications since the mid-1950s, emphasizing applied and interdisciplinary inquiry in the realms of urban development, regional planning, and environmental management. The institution boasts a considerable complement of full-time academic personnel, alongside a diverse array of research scientists, encompassing roles from tutorial assistants to senior lecturers. The candidates selected for participation in this study were deemed the most qualified due to their

primary responsibilities in teaching and conducting research. At the time of the study, the university boasted a total of 327 academic staff members.

The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for sample estimation, served as the basis for determining the sample size for this study. Based on the table, for a population of 327 (rounded 320), the sample size was estimated at 175 academics.

Table 1: Partial Extracted Krejcie and Morgan, (1970) Table for Estimating Sample Size.

SN.	**Study Population Size (N)**	**Calculated Sample Size (S)**
1.	210	136
2.	220	140
3.	230	144
4.	240	148
5.	250	152
6.	260	155
7.	270	159
8.	280	162
9.	290	165
10.	300	169
11.	**320**	**175**
12	340	181

Source: Krejcie & Morgan, (1970)

A representative sample of scholars engaged at ARU was acquired through stratified random sampling, in which the population was categorized into strata according to the schools or faculties of the institution to which the respondents are affiliated. The selection of the sample size within each stratum was conducted in accordance with its respective population proportion. Consequently, an increase in the population of the school or faculty correlates with a larger sample size, and conversely, a decrease results in a smaller sample size. A total of 175 respondents were selected for the quantitative data, consisting of academic staff from five schools: 41 from SACEM, 38 from SERBI, 36 from SSPSS, 34 from SEES, and 26 from IHSS.

A total of 15 respondents were deliberately chosen for the interviews concerning the qualitative data. The composition consists of heads of departments, deans, and directors from each school or directorate, professors and their respective associates. The researchers employed purposive sampling as it enables the selection of samples based on their understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Consequently, individuals holding the titles of professor and associate professor were intentionally chosen for interviews, given that these academic roles are closely associated with professionals who have achieved notable recognition through their research endeavors and possess substantial experience in the realm of scholarly publishing. The selection of deans and heads of departments for the study was conducted with careful consideration of their roles and the positions they occupy within the University.

The instruments for data collection included questionnaires and interview guides featuring structured questions. The questionnaire served as the primary method that guided the study. The copies of the questionnaire were personally administered to the respondents by the researcher. This method enabled rapid data collection from a large sample. A structured face-to-face interview was conducted with key informants, ensuring that the questions remained consistent across all respondents. This method enabled the investigator to delve deeper into supplementary information, perspectives, and insights from the study participants.

The data were examined and displayed variably based on their characteristics. The quantitative data obtained from surveys were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)

version 20 to produce frequency tables and percentages. The qualitative data from the interviews was subjected to content analysis, whereby several themes were found, classified, and presented via explanations and direct quotes. Ethical permission was secured by Ardhi University prior to the initiation of the investigation.

Results and Discussion

The results are arranged thematically to align with the objectives of the study, emphasizing their knowledge and comprehension of predatory publishing activities, and the standards by which they evaluate the reliability of scholarly publications. Also, sociodemographic characteristics of the participants are presented. The results provide an overview of the current state of knowledge among researchers and offer insights into prevailing perceptions and experiences related to predatory publishing within the university context. The questionnaire was sent to 175 school members and 125 (N=125) of them were filled and returned that translated into 71.4% response rate. As regards to the interviews, a total of 15 participants were included, however the researcher conducted 7 interviews with the key informant and reached the point of saturation.

Socio-Demographic Information of Respondents

This section presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, particularly their sex, education level, academic positions, and schools/departments. The results in Figure 1 revealed that male respondents dominated the study than the female respondents. These findings suggest that even if the number of male participants slightly exceeded that of female participants, both sexes were represented in the survey. However, this slight variation in sex composition is not a significant concern because the difference was attributed to the ratio of male-to-female staff composition at the institution, were the number of males was higher compared to female.

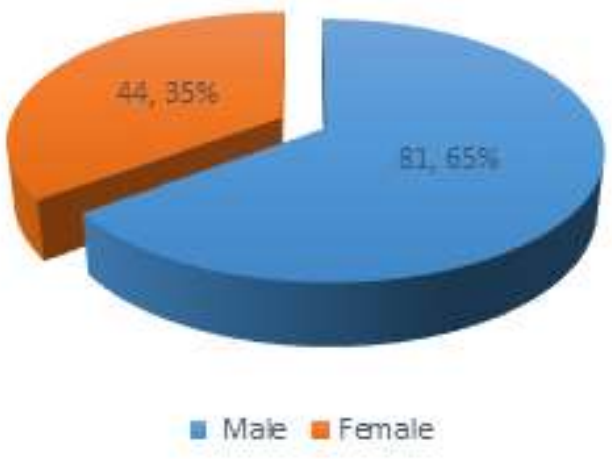


Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents by Sex
Source: Field Data (2024)

The findings in Figure 2 indicate that most respondents are in the middle of their careers. At the same time, they are actively engaged in research and teaching. There is a significant part of the respondents with a PhD; this group of academics is expected to have an extensive understanding and experience in scientific publishing practices, and their dynamics and views could add valuable insights on identifying predatory journals and ways to curb them.

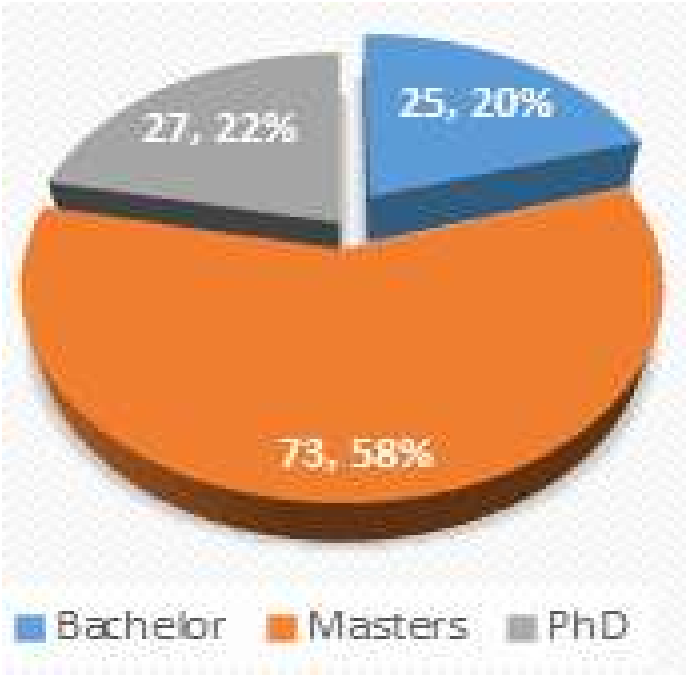
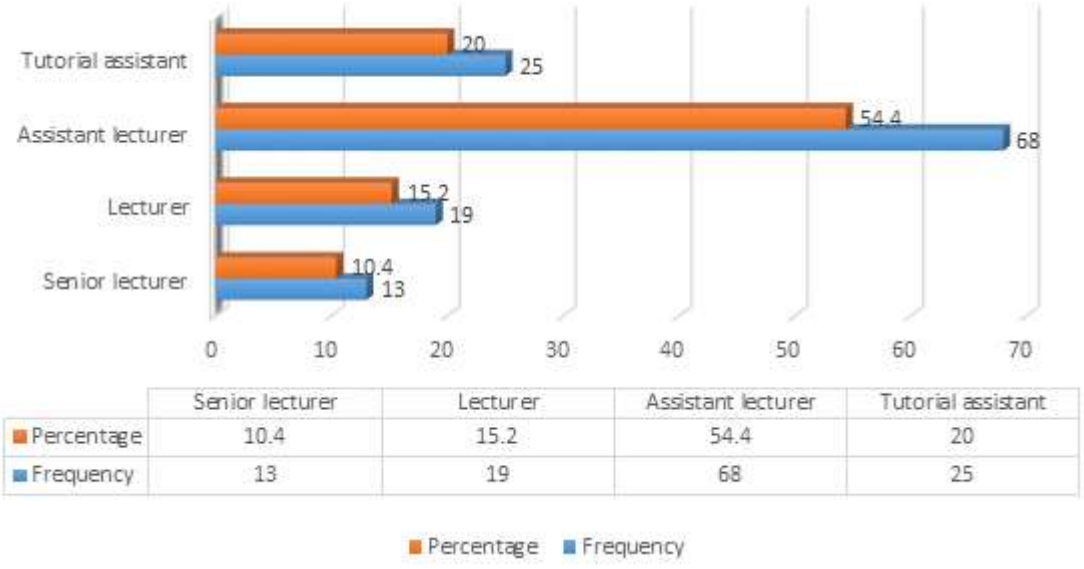


Figure 2: Distribution of Respondents by Education Level

Source: Field Data, (2024)

The results in Figure 3 indicate the diverse distribution of academic ranks of the respondents at ARU. This diversity ensures that the study captures perspectives from both early-career and experienced academics, providing a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.



	Senior lecturer	Lecturer	Assistant lecturer	Tutorial assistant
Percentage	10.4	15.2	54.4	20
Frequency	13	19	68	25

Figure 3: Distribution of Respondents by Academic Rank
Source: Field Data, (2024)

Among the 125 respondents, the highest proportion is affiliated with the School of Environmental Sciences and Engineering (SEES), followed closely behind with the School of Spatial Planning and Social Sciences (SSPSS). This was reflected in the stratified randomly

sampling technique used to determine the sample size for each school and department. Therefore, the school with a higher number of academic staff had a high ratio of respondents and vice versa.

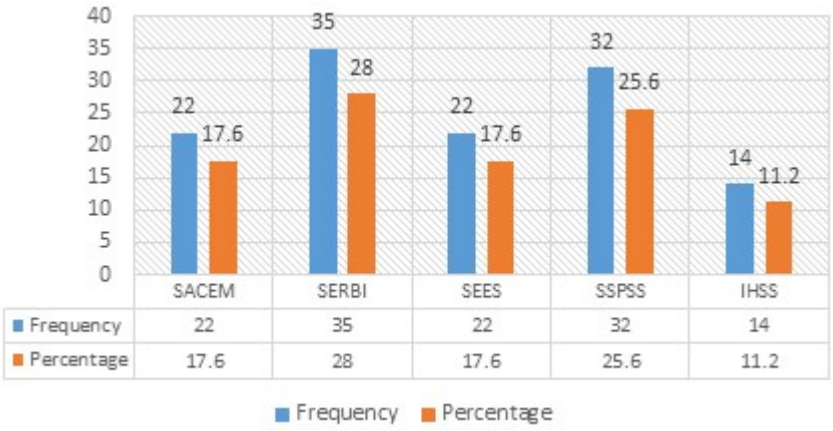


Figure 4: Distribution of Respondents by Schools/Departments

Source: Field Data, (2024)

Academics' Awareness of Predatory Publishing Practices

The study aimed to establish academics' awareness of predatory publishing practices. For a thorough exploration of this objective, several questions were asked and their responses are presented in the subsequent subsection. Respondents were asked if they had heard about or were aware of PJs, to evaluate the awareness of PJs. Figure 5 summarizes the findings:



Figure 5: Academics' Awareness of Predatory Journals

Source: Field Data, (2024)

A follow up question asked Respondents to rate their level of awareness about predatory publishing practices. The findings are presented in Figure 6:

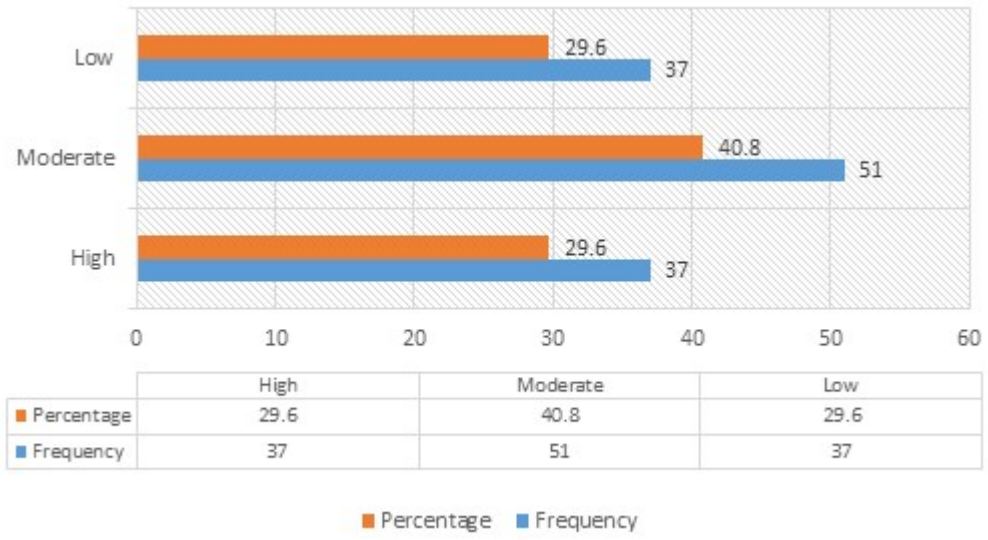


Figure 6: Academics' Level of Awareness about Predatory Publishing Practices

Source: Field Data, (2024)

During the interviews, participants were asked the same question on awareness and they all confirmed that they were aware of PJs. Three respondents, namely R1, R2, and R3 had this to say respectively:

> I became aware of the concept of the PJs through my mentor who told me to be cautious and not to publish in such journals when I wanted to publish my first paper, since the university didn't recognize them so it would be a waste of time and effort used in the production of the paper [R1].

R2 had this to say:

> I heard the term PJs when I wanted to publish with my colleagues in the department. One day, I told him that I received a call for papers from a certain journal in my email, when he saw the mail, he told me that it was from a PJs publisher and that we should ignore it [R2].

Another respondent, R3 had this to say:

> I became familiar with the PJs when I was in college. I joined the university library, and one of the librarians informed us of the danger of patronizing fake journals and shared with us a list of reputable journals that the college recognized [R3].

The results of this survey show that a significant majority of Ardhi University's academic staff are aware of predatory journals, whilst only a small proportion said they were unaware of the phrase or its connotations. This degree of awareness is consistent with results from earlier research done in comparable settings. For example, Tella, (2026) discovered that most Nigerian scholars were aware of predatory publication, while Richtig et al., (2018) likewise noted that European researchers were well aware of the practice. Similarly, academic librarians at Nigerian universities were fully aware of the presence and repercussions of predatory journals, according to Owolabi et al., (2020). This kind of understanding is essential for preventing the academic community from becoming a victim of dishonest publishers that undermine the caliber and legitimacy of research. However, the study also discovered that there were significant differences in the depth of awareness, some scholars were able to effectively

describe the characteristics of PJs, such as their deceptive indexing, lack of peer review, and poor editing standards, while others showed just a cursory acquaintance, which might leave them open to advanced predatory strategies.

Moreover, the existence of a sizable minority that is ignorant draws attention to a critical risk group in the academic community. These people could unwittingly submit their work to unreliable publications, damaging their academic reputations and lessening the prominence and influence of their studies. This discrepancy in understanding highlights the necessity of focused educational campaigns, institutional guidelines, and mentorship programs to close knowledge gaps and encourage ethical publishing practices among all academic levels. The results of the study are also consistent with the larger body of scholarly literature, which indicates that while awareness of predatory journals is growing worldwide, knowledge of their distinguishing traits and long-term effects varies among disciplines and institutions (Kharumnuid & Deo, 2022; Kumari, 2021). Thus, even if the academics at the University exhibits encouraging levels of public awareness, more work is required to expand knowledge and create a research climate that is resistant to predatory publishing techniques.

Academics' Understanding of Predatory Journals

Table 2 provides respondents' responses on understanding and explanations about predatory journals.

Table 2: Academics' Understanding of Predatory Journal

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
PJs publish a high number of low-quality manuscripts without Peer review	101	81
PJ's scope might be broad, and sometimes they may use the word international	84	67
PJs may add fake (non-existing) editors or the names of well-known authors without their approval	75	60
PJs do not indicate their institutional affiliations and Indexation	70	56
PJs use fake ISSN/Logo/Title or Alphabetical mismatch in titles	68	54
PJs may use false impact factors to attract manuscript submissions.	67	54
PJs do not follow the scholarly publishing industry's best practices.	66	53
PJs use a short time between submission and publication	66	53
I know the peer review process may noct be clearly stated on the PJ's website	64	51
PJs' contact information is always not learly stated on the journal's website	64	51
I know that publishing in PJs may hurt my career and institution	60	48
PJs lack transparency or honesty regarding the ownership and headquarters location of the publisher	55	44
Beall's List Websites provide predatory journals details	50	40
PJs do not indicate their license	49	39
PJs falsely list or exaggerate the credibility of the editorial board	58	46

Source: Field Data, (2024)

Upon asking the participant about their understand of PJs, the findings revealed that 101 (81%) respondents described that PJs publish a high number of low-quality manuscripts and without

peer review, 84 (67%) described that PJs' scope might be broad, and sometimes they may use the word international, 75 (60%) described that PJs may add fake (non-existing) editors or the names of well-known authors without their approval and 70 (56%) described that PJs do not indicate their institutional affiliations and indexation. As open access journals became more popular, more publishers began to take advantage of the open access concept. The PJs primary objective was to benefit financially from authors through APC, but they don't offer adequate indexing or meaningful peer review. The primary distinction is that reputable, open-access journals use an effective peer review procedure, whereas predatory journals exhibit minimal or no peer review whatsoever. The findings concur with what was found during the interview sessions with heads of the schools/departments, as one of the key informants explained:

Predatory journals usually have weak or lack editorial boards and thorough manuscript review processes, resulting in published poorly or low-quality papers with numerous technical, grammatical, and editorial errors. For instance, you may find the journal has released an article without even describing the processes employed to generate results [D2]

Concurring to this, another key informant said that:

> PJs make fake promises of achieving a quick peer review procedure and guaranteeing prompt manuscript publication as long as the author pays publishing costs. Although these publishers charge a price, they do not offer the promised and anticipated services [D3].

Furthermore, another key informant added that:

> Some PJs attempt to be legitimate by using journal titles that sound similar to well-known journals, and they frequently state that they are included in major scientific databases like PubMed, Web of Science, or Scopus with forged impact factors [D1].

Adding to this, another key informant commented that:

> PJs use phrases like global and international to give the impression of their notoriety. Just to mislead authors especially the inexperienced who are eager to publish [D4].

Since the peer review process is a critical element in guaranteeing research integrity, thus, researchers are encouraged to submit research publications to reputable publishers with an efficient peer review procedure. Additionally, scholars can search Scopus, Web of science, and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) for high-quality journals. DOAJ is still the most popular whitelist of legitimate journals, which offers the option to reject publications that present misleading information. DOAJ is still the most popular whitelist of legitimate journals, which offers the option to reject publications that present misleading information (Richtig et al., 2018). Despite the fact that a significant number of respondents identified the primary characteristics of predatory publishing, such as the ability to identify unsolicited email invitations, there is a substantial disparity in their comprehensive understanding.

However, respondents shown a lack of understanding of subtler markers that might make these journals harder to spot, such as the Beall's List Websites that PJs details and lack of license information. Despite its contentious character, Beall's List is still a useful resource for many researchers. Its historical significance in spotting predatory publishers and its availability as a publicly accessible resource may be the reasons for its continued use. However, due to criticism

of Beall's List's subjective criteria and lack of official support, many scholars steer clear of it. This concern was further supported by Rana et al, (2020), which found that only 38.2% of respondents at The Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science study were aware of Beall's List, highlights a serious lack of awareness among researchers, even those who are familiar with the idea of PJs.

Overall, even while a large number of scholars are able to identify the obvious characteristics of predatory publication, they still need to improve their comprehension of the subtler warning indicators. Closing these knowledge gaps and promoting ethical academic publishing practices calls for institutional training, mentorship programs, and access to verification tools like Beall's List and the Think. Check. Submit.

Rating the Characteristics of Predatory Journals

Respondents were asked a follow-up question to rate the statements related to the characteristics of predatory journals. To re-align the question with the existing situation, respondents were asked to rank their agreement with certain statements on a Five-Point Likert Scale (Very High, High, Moderate, Low, and Very Low). Table 3 lists the statements and summarizes the findings:

Table 3: Rating the Characteristics of Predatory Journals (N=125)

Statement	VH	H	M	L	VL	M	STD
The Journal website looks professional	16 13%	22 18%	26 21%	31 25%	30 24.0%	3.10	1.306
The rapid acceptance of articles	45 36%	51 41%	15 12%	11 9%	3 2%	2.01	1.028
Has an editor and editorial board with full names and affiliations	9 7%	20 16%	29 23%	33 26%	34 28%	3.50	1.248
Rapid publication of articles	48 39%	40 32%	15 12%	14 11%	8 6%	2.15	1.232
Contact information is defined	8 6%	20 16%	23 18%	28 23%	46 37%	3.67	1.294
Rapid peer review of 2 weeks or less	36 29%	46 37%	14 11%	20 16%	9 7%	2.36	1.253
The journal states the amount of money an author should pay for publication	26 21%	24 19%	34 27%	25 20%	16 13%	2.85	1.314
The journal is included in major databases (i.e., PubMed, Scopus, DOAJ, etc.)	6 5%	14 11%	34 27%	27 22%	44 35%	3.71	1.197
The Journal webpage is poorly designed and functioning	28 22%	26 21%	36 29%	16 13%	19 15%	2.78	1.343
The journal title has a national or international affiliation	15 12%	22 18%	45 36%	24 19%	19 15%	3.08	1.209
No valid contact information (email, telephone number, address) is provided	30 24%	28 22%)	31 25%	24 19%	12 10%	2.68	1.293
The journal has published 5 or fewer articles	6 5%	32 26%	59 47%	15 12%	13 10%	2.98	0.996
The journal appears within the top 5 entries on the first page of search results	1 1%	22 18%	60 48%	23 18%	19 15%	3.30	0.959
The journal does not have an archive of its past publication	13 10%	33 26%	52 42%	20 16%	7 6%	2.80	1.016
The journal states it is peer-reviewed and has no review policy listed	19 15%	40 32%	32 26%	18 14%	16 13%	2.78	1.243

Statement	VH	H	M	L	VL	M	STD
The journal name cannot be confused with another journal	2 2%	23 18%	52 42%	31 25%	17 13%	3.30	0.977
The journal clearly describes its contact and licensing information	7 6%	13 10%	33 26%	33 26%	39 32%	3.67	1.183
The journal provides full text of articles published	5 4%	17 14%	47 38%	32 25%	24 19%	3.42	1.072
The journal does not state its business model	12 10%	39 31%	44 35%	22 18%	8 6%	2.80	1.047
Published articles are poorly copy-edited and contain numerous typographical or grammatical errors	39 31%	34 27%	32 26%	11 9%	9 7%)	2.34	1.211

Source: Field Data, (2024)

The results from the analysis confirm that Ardhi University academics are aware of a number of features that distinguish PJs, especially those pertaining to the quality, lack of transparency and speed of the publication process. The common characteristic of these publications is the speed of publication, often without thorough peer assessment hence compromising the quality of research. Predatory publishers frequently approve papers quickly, contrary to reputable journals that offer thorough peer review input. While these expedited procedures may seem enticing to academics who are under pressure to publish, predatory publishers usually use them to attract submissions without providing enough editorial control. The lack of clear peer review procedures and contact details, and false indexing claims were all mentioned by the respondents

In an attempt to give themselves a false feeling of credibility, several PJs advertised themselves as having an international or worldwide reach. This is in line with (Tella, (2026) who highlighted that PJs usually use deceptive names and aggressive marketing strategies to take advantage of unwary writers. Predatory publishers frequently adopt names that closely resemble those of reputable journals, which increases the probability of inadvertent submissions and creates confusion. Early-career researchers are particularly affected by this dishonest practice since they might not have the experience to recognize warning indicators, consequently may be misled by these tactics, which also damage the credibility of scholarly work.

Respondents also cited the deficient editing standards found in published articles, which included typographical and grammatical mistakes, unclear ownership and business model details, and a lack of license. This supports Beall's (2016) findings that predatory journals tend to have lax quality control and put profit ahead of academic norms These characteristics were also noted by Mouton and Valentine (2017) and Beall (2016) as being a part of a larger pattern of dishonest activity that defines predatory publishing. The findings show that although many employees are aware of the main reflags of PJs, however more trainings are required to help them better comprehend the less obvious but no less important warning flags.

Therefore, in order to improve the integrity of academic publishing, institutions should prioritize training in journal assessment procedures using standardized tools and checklists. This would boost researchers' capacity to differentiate between respectable and predatory publishers. By focusing on early-career academics, this kind of structured training guarantees that they acquire the abilities they need at the start of their careers, lowering their vulnerability to predatory publishers and enhancing long-term research integrity. Enhancing this capability will help to protect academic excellence and encourage ethical publication practices.

Credibility of Journals when Selecting a Publication Avenue

Table 4 summarizes how respondents assess the credibility of journals when selecting a publication avenue. The findings in Table 4 highlight key criteria respondents assess when selecting a journal for submission. The study found that most academics prioritize essential criteria including strict peer review, followed by editorial board reputation, and validated impact factor when assessing the credibility of journals in selecting a publication avenue. Corresponding to this, Mali and Mahajan, (2021) claimed that peer review, editing, editorial boards, editorial services, and other ethical practices are lacking in PJs. The quality of published research is frequently undermined by predatory publishers, who frequently make promises of peer review but fail to provide meaningful evaluation.

Table 4: Credibility of Journals when Selecting a Publication Avenue.

Checklist	Frequency	Percentage
Peer Review Process	106	85
Editorial Board Reputation	93	74
Impact factor	86	69
Indexing in renowned abstracting services e.g. (Scopus, Web of Science, etc.)	69	55
Previous Publications	67	54
Scope of journal	67	54
Availability of persistent identifiers e.g. (DOI, ORCID, etc.)	67	54
Access to journal articles	57	46
Institutional affiliation	53	42
Journal website	52	42
Copyright information	40	32
Submission system	36	29
Publication costs	35	28
Publishing schedule	35	28
Number of articles published	32	26
Publisher contact information	30	24
Web search for the journal	29	23
Journal name	22	18
Revenue sources	14	11

Source: Field Data, (2024)

According to Shrestha, (2020), predatory publishing is characterized by a weak peer review process since these journals put profit ahead of academic integrity, which frequently results in the publication of inferior or irrelevant information. This emphasizes the significance of researchers ensuring that their work undergoes a legitimate review procedure in order to preserve academic credibility. Although the respondents use the peer review process as a primary quality check, earlier finding showed that respondents do not fully understand predatory practices. This highlights a critical gap where researchers rely on peer review but may not know how to verify if it actually happened.

It was also added that the credibility of the journal may be assessed by reviewing where it is indexed, its publishing history, peer-reviewed, and journal impact factor (Chandra et al., (2025). A journal's credibility is established by its indexing in databases such as the DOAJ, Scopus, and Web of Science, which verify that it adheres to stringent standards for transparency, peer review, and editorial quality. Predatory publishers frequently make false

claims about indexing or lack recognized listings, which complicates the process of verifying legitimacy for researchers and elevates the likelihood of publishing in low-quality outlets.

Many African scholars use publication venues listed in databases like African Journals Online (AJOL), which specializes in African research and guarantees that journals adhere to regional academic norms, in order to reduce this risk. This signifies that maintaining adequate indexing must be a primary issue for researchers. These practices represent a thorough strategy to guarantee standards and trustworthiness of scientific publication avenue, thus the understanding will support academics to make informed decisions when selecting journals to publish their works. However, these criteria can be expanded to include technical, ethical, and operational aspects, ensuring a robust and comprehensive selection process to mitigate the risks of falling victim to predatory publishing while upholding the impact and integrity of research output.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study indicates that while a notable percentage of academic staff at Ardhi University recognizes the existence of PJs, their understanding of the characteristics, implications, and methods for identifying them is moderate and inconsistent. Although many respondents showed familiarity with traits such as the absence of peer review, rapid publication, and misleading indexing claims, their awareness of other essential indicators such as licensing transparency and legitimate editorial structures, was relatively low. Moreover, the study highlights the vulnerability of researchers, especially early-career academics, to exploitative publishing practices due to a lack of training and institutional support. This situation emphasizes the urgent need for comprehensive awareness campaigns, capacity building programs, and clear institutional guidelines that will equip academics with the necessary skills and tools to identify credible publication outlets. Strengthening these support systems is essential for maintaining research integrity, improving scholarly impact, and ensuring that academic contributions from Tanzanian institutions align with international standards of credibility and excellence**.**

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several key recommendations are proposed to improve academic awareness and protect scholarly publishing practices at Ardhi University and similar institutions.

First, the university, through the office of postgraduate research and publication, should enhance awareness campaigns by organizing regular and ongoing practical training workshops, seminars, and mentorship sessions in each academic year. These initiatives should focus on educating academic staff, especially junior staff (tutorial assistants and assistant lecturers) about the risks and characteristics of predatory publishing, as well as providing strategies to help them avoid such practices;

Second, the curriculum developers should incorporate Research and publishing ethics into postgraduate training and academic staff development programs to promote a culture of excellence and ethical scholarly communication to enhance quality of research output.

Third, the University administrators should create, maintain and share explicit institution guidelines and policies that define acceptable publishing standards while recommending reputable journals and databases;

Furthermore, it will be essential to establish collaboration and peer support mechanisms in which experienced scholars can assist early-career researchers in choosing reputable journals and navigating the publishing process;

Finally, university libraries, through the librarians should encourage the use of established tools and resources, such as Beall's List, the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and the "Think. Check. Submit." initiative. These resources can help researchers evaluate journal credibility and steer clear of predatory outlets. By implementing these measures, institutions will enhance their ability to promote high-quality and ethical research dissemination.

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