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Scientific Productivity and Retracted Literature of Authors with Kazakhstani Affiliations During 2013–2023

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Abstract

Kazakhstan, a post-Soviet country that began transitioning its research system from the Soviet model to a Western one, instituted an EU-like, meritocracy-based rewards system for publishing between

2009 and 2012. This resulted in a sharp rise in the number of publications between 2012 and 2020. To complement existing studies, Scopus and Web of Science were sourced (16 February – 1 March 2024) to assess the scientific productivity of affiliations in Kazakhstan, noting that growth rate slowed to 6.1% in 2021, 4% in 2022, and 6.8% in 2023 (relative to an average annual growth rate of 35.3% in 2013–2020). In 2023, 20.4% of those publications were in MDPI journals. Separately, the Scopus-indexed retractions associated with Kazakhstani affiliations were assessed for 2013–2023. The vast majority (26/36) of retractions were related to fake peer review, with 14 in Elsevier’s *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, and the highest volume was in the 2016–2019 period. Of note, none of the 36 Scopus-indexed retracted papers had an associated institutional email. The emphasis on bibliometric indicators has led to an increase in manipulations and unethical actions by individual authors. These actions were driven by the desire to achieve personal and institutional goals, as well as imperfections in regulatory documents and delayed or hesitant actions of authorizing bodies. The findings of this study offer a unique contemporary perspective of scientific productivity in Kazakhstan while shedding light—through the prism of retractions, paper mills, and “predatory” publishing—on the ethics of the publication process.

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Data Availability

Data is available upon reasonable request.

Notes

1. There is some disagreement in retraction volumes between Koçyiğit and Akyol ([2022](#)); Koçyiğit et al. ([2023b](#)), despite representing the same retraction-related data sets.
2. Source: <https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/scopus/how-scopus-works/content>.

3. Not only did we verify, via the submission manager (<https://www.editorialmanager.com/tsc/default2.aspx>), the mandatory requirement for submitting authors (or paper mills) to suggest three reviewers, which editors might or might not employ for peer review, the wording of the RN “manipulation of the peer review process” lends itself to ambiguous interpretation regarding which aspect(s) precisely of the peer review process was manipulated, and precisely by whom.
4. In his analysis, Kenessov ([2020](#)) calculated the number of articles by Kazakhstani authors published in journals that have been delisted from Scopus. Given that the majority of these journals were deindexed due to ethical violations, we use the term “predatory” to refer to these journals.
5. Archived at:
https://web.archive.org/web/20250000000000*/https://scholarlyoa.com.
6. Even so, there is still a solid body of researchers from Kazakhstan that publish in Russian journals, according to a 2000–2021 analysis (Sterligov, [2023](#)).

Xu, S-X., & Hu, G-W. (2022). Non-author entities accountable for Retractions: A diachronic and cross-disciplinary exploration of reasons for Retraction. *Learned Publishing*, 35(2), 261–270.

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Contributions

Both authors conceptualized the study and its design. The first author conducted the analyses in Scopus and Web of Science while the second author validated those findings. Both authors contributed equally to the writing and editing, read and approved the final version of the manuscript, and take responsibility for the content of the paper. The first author used ChatGPT-4 to make translations and grammatical edits to the final version of the text that he wrote.

Corresponding authors

Ethics declarations

Note Regarding Websites

All websites in the reference list were last accessed and their links were validated on 1 February 2025. Currency exchange rates of Tenge were also expressed as \$US, and calculated according to an online currency converted (<https://www.xe.com/>) on 19 March 2025.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declares no conflicts of interest.

Additional information

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