

## Knowledge Democratization and Inclusion: The Role of Wikipedia and Its Implications for International Relations Scholars

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### ABSTRACT

In its 23 years of existence, Wikipedia has evolved into a widely utilized and influential internet platform, boasting 58 million articles in over 300 languages and garnering more than 16 billion monthly views globally. This collaborative and openly editable nature positions Wikipedia as a significant source of democratized knowledge, aligning with the mission of Wikimedia Indonesia to "Bebaskan Pengetahuan" (Open the Knowledge). Using the case study of Klub Wiki UB, we apply a mixed methods approach with a comprehensive literature review and survey aimed at Klub Wiki UB members. This study explores Wikipedia's role in knowledge democratization and its application in the field of International Relations (IR) at the university level in Indonesia and abroad. While some previous studies reveal content and gender gaps still exist in Wikipedia, this study emphasizes the potential benefits of Wikipedia when used appropriately through the open and collaborative spirit of the Wikimedia movement. Furthermore, Wikimedia movement could foster social inclusion of youth by offering them opportunities to develop their skills, enhance their abilities, and actively participate in society through a myriad of activities, such as edit-a-thons, trainings, and community meetups. The positive engagement with Wikipedia in higher education underscores its value as a dynamic, accessible, and inclusive knowledge-sharing platform.

**Keywords:** *higher education, knowledge democratization, open knowledge, social inclusion, Wikipedia*

### INTRODUCTION

Entering its 23rd year, Wikipedia is one of the most widely used internet sites, as well as the largest online encyclopedia in the world. By 2023, Wikipedia has 58 million articles in more than 300 languages from around the world and is read more than 16 billion times every month (Wikimedia Foundation, 2023). Wikipedia's collaborative and open-to-edit nature makes it one of the most influential sites. The massive use of Wikipedia shows the high public interest in accessing knowledge in accordance with Wikimedia Indonesia's slogan (Bebaskan Pengetahuan) "Open the Knowledge". This is in line with what was expressed by Wikipedia's founder, Jimmy Wales (Slashdot, 2004): "Imagine a world where everyone on the planet is given free access to all human knowledge. That's what we're doing."

It is recorded that there are more than 280,000 active editors who contribute to Wikimedia projects every month (Wikimedia Foundation, 2023). In Indonesia itself, there are around 7,000 active editors who contribute to Wikimedia projects in 15 regional languages and Indonesian. In addition, Wikipedia also has sister projects under the Wikimedia Foundation which has grown into a global movement, such as Wikisource, Wikidata, Wikibooks among others. Wikimedia also contains chapters, communities, clubs, and affiliations all over the world (Wikimedia Foundation, 2023).

When it first appeared in 2001, Wikipedia was considered to have disrupted the traditional encyclopedia model that had relied on professional writers, editors, and publishers. Wikipedia instead offered a new idea and format for an encyclopedia that was free and open so that basically anyone could edit it. This is one model of democratization of knowledge in the open access ecosystem that emerged in the early 21st century (Van Der Velden, 2011). We live in an era of information abundance. However, this information is spread across all platforms and sometimes causes problems since it does not have scientific quality. This has created a unique situation on Wikipedia where knowledge is more readily available and constantly maintained (by its contributors) than in any other publication. The sheer volume of information online often leads to misinformation, making it increasingly difficult to identify credible sources (Lewandowsky, et.al., 2017). The growing number of complex global challenges faced by scholars and practitioners underscores how critical it is to democratize access to information and address this gap in knowledge, especially in underrepresented areas. The open model of Wikipedia allows for rapid dissemination, localization of critical information. Consequently, a duty for the International Relations epistemic community is engaging those platforms as guarantors of both quality and breadth of global knowledge production.

This article was written to provide a new perspective on the role of Wikipedia as part of the democratization of knowledge and its use for International Relations scholars, both at home and abroad. We argue that Wikipedia and other Wikimedia projects should be utilized widely by the International Relations epistemic community as it can provide great benefits, such as the development of open science, knowledge democratization, and improvement of digital literacy (Jemielniak, 2014; Pratesi, Miller, & Sutton, 2019). Although Wikipedia is not without its shortcomings, these shortcomings can be fixed together, in accordance with the spirit of the open and collaborative Wikimedia movement.

## **METHODS**

This research uses a mixed methods with survey and interview to gather information. First, we conducted a survey to collect general opinions from KlubWiki UB members. The survey included simple questions with multiple-choice and open-ended options to

understand people’s views on the topic. We sent the survey online and received responses from 12 participants. Next, we conducted interviews to gather more detailed information. We selected 3 participants from the survey who had interesting or unique answers. The interviews were done one-on-one and each interview lasted about 20-30 minutes. We asked open-ended questions to let participants share their experiences and opinions freely. This helped us understand the reasons behind their survey answers. The combination of surveys and interviews gave us a better understanding of the topic, with both broad and deep insights. We carefully recorded all the answers and used notes and transcripts for qualitative data analysis. This method helped us find patterns and themes in people’s responses, making our research more complete and reliable.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Use of Wikipedia**

Wikipedia is one of the most visited websites in the world, even ranking in the top five in the world. Every day, millions of people access Wikipedia information. For many people, Wikipedia is the first step when searching for information about politics, international events, and various other topics as can be seen on the Wikipedia homepage (<https://id.wikipedia.org/>). At the beginning of it, many people are skeptics of what Wikipedia could have done, especially since the online encyclopedia are organized by groups of volunteers in decentralized manner with the jargon “anyone can edit”. However, research have shown that Wikipedia articles are pretty accurate, even compared to other encyclopedias, such as Britannica (Ackerly & Michelitch, 2022; Jemielniak, 2014; Orlowitz, 2020). Thus, Wikipedia gained reputation and trust as “a commons of public fact-checking” (Orlowitz, 2020)

In the last decade, more professionals and academics endorse the open nature of Wikipedia and began to examine the critical use of it. There have been calls for Wikipedia to engage more with education sector. The Wikimedia Foundation and its affiliates have created and managed diverse projects across the world—most notably Reading Wikipedia In The Classroom and Wikimedian In Residence—developed to help educators and students understand how Wikipedia works and contribute to it (Orlowitz, 2020).

Despite progress, Wikipedia still faces several challenges in making sure the articles are accurate, complete, and unbiased. There are at least two major gaps in Wikipedia, namely gender gaps and content gaps due to the majority of the editors being male. Less than 20% of all biographies are on women and only 13% of its editors identify as women (Wikimedia Foundation, n.d.). The systemic biases of Wikipedia have been well documented, with various authors offered their analyses and solutions (John-Leighton & Pearson, 2023; Langrock & González-Bailón, 2022; Qaiser, Zaringhalam, Bernardi, Wade, & Pinckney, 2022). These systemic biases mirror broader biases in knowledge

production and present challenges for accomplishing a democratic and inclusive community of Wikipedia editors.

Ackerly & Michelitch (2022) identified four key biases in Wikipedia’s politics and political scientists articles, namely: (1) skewed perspectives from historically privileged groups, (2) a lack of entries about political scientists from underrepresented groups, (3) gaps in subnational politics coverage, and (4) insufficient information on the Global South. These biases are also intertwined with gender, racial, geographical, and societal biases (Kaiser et al., 2022), highlighting local and global inequalities to knowledge production. Ackerly & Michelitch (2022) suggest that political science students are ideal Wikipedia editors due to their access to scholarly resources and academic support. They call on political science educators and students to improve Wikipedia and become more informed consumers of its content (Ackerly & Michelitch, 2022).

### **Empowering International Relations Studies**

Through this research we will provide an overview of Wikipedia’s benefits for International Relations (IR) studies, proposing solutions to the existing problems, and showcasing our experience in managing KlubWiki Universitas Brawijaya. We will begin by critically examining the Wikipedia’s role in knowledge production and democratization.

Despite being the largest online encyclopedia, Wikipedia suffers from content gaps as the interests of the contributors and volunteers may differ from general public, thus, not all fields of study have the same coverage on Wikipedia. Based on research by Halavais & Lackaff (2008), there is a significant difference in the coverage of Wikipedia articles. Wikipedia has more articles on naval sciences, music, geography, and American history than printed books. In contrast, articles on the topics of law, social sciences, and medicine tend to be fewer than printed books. This shows that there are differences in topic coverage caused by the varying interests of Wikipedia editors. For example, articles on music and art are dominated by fans, although the content is less comprehensive. In contrast, articles on the topics of law, politics, and medicine require expertise and specific knowledge, so these articles are fewer in number, but the content of the articles is more comprehensive.

This problem can also be found in articles in the field of International Relations on the Indonesian Wikipedia. The coverage of articles on the topic of IR is still narrow, with many pages are incomplete, outdated, or even inaccurate. Even articles on diplomacy and IR theories still have many shortcomings. This is a great opportunity for IR scholars to contribute and help improve the quality and accuracy of information available to the general public.

Wikipedia empowers international relations studies by democratizing access to information, fostering critical analysis of global issues, and enabling real-time collaboration across borders. The collaborative nature of Wikipedia allows for the integration of various viewpoints and expertise, which is essential in the field of international relations, where understanding multiple perspectives is crucial for analysis and policy-making.

One significant aspect of Wikipedia's impact is its role in knowledge dissemination. As highlighted, Wikipedia's representation of knowledge can be skewed due to biases in editorial contributions, which can affect the quality and comprehensiveness of information available on international relations topics (Zheng et al., 2022). However, initiatives aimed at improving article quality through collaborative efforts can enhance the reliability of information, making it a valuable resource for scholars and practitioners in the field (Morata, 2023).

The crowdsourcing model of Wikipedia allows for the incorporation of diverse international perspectives, which is vital for understanding global issues (Morata, 2023). For example, the article on the Syrian Civil War has been translated into 91 languages, allowing contributions from editors worldwide, offering varied viewpoints on the conflict's causes, impacts, and international responses. This contributes to a more inclusive global discourse on international relations.

Furthermore, Wikipedia can serve as an educational tool that promotes active learning and engagement among students of international relations. Research indicates that using Wikipedia in academic settings can enhance students' understanding of complex topics by encouraging them to contribute and edit articles (Martin et al., 2022). Their experiences demonstrate that Wikipedia can effectively engage students in collaborative, real-world learning while enhancing their critical thinking, research, and writing skills. This not only improves their research and writing skills but also fosters a sense of responsibility towards the accuracy and quality of information shared in the public domain (Martin et al., 2022).

Wikipedia has contributed towards bridging global knowledge gaps particularly in regions with limited access to academic resources. For example, the majority of practitioners and university students in Indonesia rarely have access to international reputation standard publications because they are hampered by problems such as cost and budget constraints. Pricing from publishers also varies, often journal access subscriptions burden the library budget. With limited financial resources in several universities in Indonesia, the number of journals that can be accessed by practitioners and students has been limited (Andayani, 2023). Therefore its open-access model provides individuals from underrepresented areas with vital information on international relations which also promotes more equitable knowledge dissemination.

The openness of the repository on Wikipedia in international relations topics can help international relations scholars in data analysis, trend tracking, and research. This can be done by tracing the references used by Wikipedia contributors. The active involvement of contributors also provides benefits in the form of access to reputable international journals through the Wikipedia Library. Thus, Wikipedia provides a system that supports scholars to actively contribute, while providing access to quality journals that can be used as additional references in research and community service (Wikimedia foundation, 2024). This opportunity is very valuable for international relations scholars, considering that there are still many international relations related articles that require more contributions and editing.

### **Case Study: KlubWiki Universitas Brawijaya**

KlubWiki Universitas was amongst the first university wiki clubs established in Indonesia and now become the only one that still exist. The wiki club was established through cooperation between Wikimedia Indonesia (WMID) and International Relations Laboratory of Universitas Brawijaya (Lab HI UB) since October 2023. KlubWiki UB is a university-based volunteer organization focusing on contributing to Wikimedia projects. Since 2023, we have organized eight activities, including Kopdar (edit-a-thons) and WikiLatih (WikiTraining) with a total of 19 members and 102 participants across faculties and departments in Universitas Brawijaya. A total of 102 Wikipedia articles have been made or edited and more than 100 entries on Wikiquote, Wikicommons, and Wikisource have been created during our activities.

In addition, KlubWiki UB also has received two project grants from Wikimedia Foundation. The first grant is called Wikibility, aimed at documenting local sign languages and improving the inclusion and visibility of Deaf communities in Indonesia. The second one is WikiDiplomasi, aimed at raising awareness of Wikipedia and its sister projects to the International Relations scholars at five universities in Indonesia and improving Wikipedia articles on diplomacy and International Relations field of study.

In our research, we conducted a survey among twelve International Relations students at Universitas Brawijaya that generate varied reactions. We use a Likert scale of 1-5 to gauge students' responses, where (1) very important and very helpful, (2) important and helpful, (3) quite important and quite helpful, (4) less important and less helpful (5) not important and not helpful. This case study examined the interaction of International Relations students with the Wikipedia platform. It was found that students searched for information on Wikipedia either occasionally or frequently. In its use for academic assignments, some used it occasionally, while a few used it regularly or not at all. However, when asked about the importance of Wikipedia for broadening their

understanding of global issues, the majority of the respondents considered it either important or quite important, with only a small portion finding it unimportant.

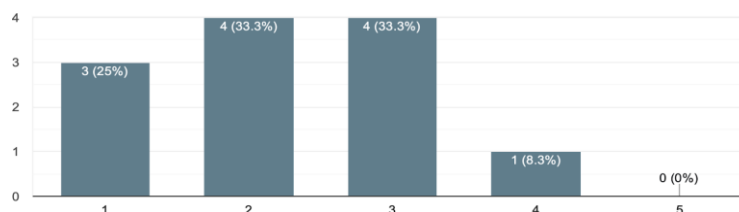


Figure 1. Wikipedia as a tool to help broaden knowledge and global issues

Wikipedia articles were perceived as moderately sufficient, with most students finding the content somewhat in-depth but not fully comprehensive. With this perception, half of the students felt that contributing by editing or adding content on Wikipedia is important. “It is necessary to initiate more articles related to Indonesia’s Foreign Policy, emphasizing data and factual information. Additionally, these articles should be made available in the various languages offered on Wikipedia, allowing them to reach a broader international audience and help raise global awareness of Indonesia.”- Rhani (IR UB student)

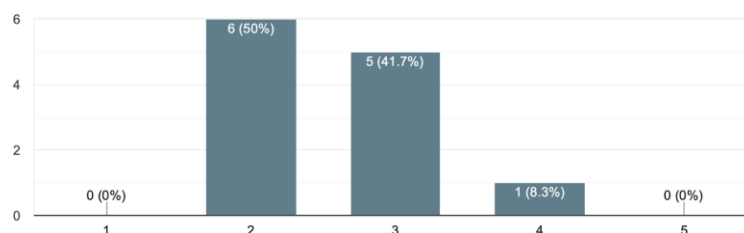


Figure 2. Wikipedia in understanding history or politics

They see Wikipedia as a helpful tool for understanding historical and political contexts in International Relations, though some felt its impact on their understanding of global issues was moderate compared to other sources like books or journals.

“So far, the range of global issues on Wikipedia is quite diverse and is constantly updated, with various perspectives without diminishing any particular viewpoint that may have the potential to cause controversy. This offers a critical and immersive reading experience.” - Sakila (IR UB student)

“In the context of International Relations, which essentially originated from the 'Western World,' it can be said that Indonesia’s perspective, or those of other Global South countries, has not yet become dominant. Not much has been published on Wikipedia, so efforts that can be made

include creating more entries related to Global South viewpoints on Wikipedia.”- Rhani (IR UB student)

Through Wikipedia, students became aware of other Wikimedia platforms. A few of them contributed to Wikisource, Wiktionary, and Wikimedia Commons. All of the students accessed Wikipedia in Indonesian, though they also occasionally accessed it in English. This is very understandable, as most International Relations articles originally come from the English Wikipedia, and not all of them are translated into Indonesian. The use of Wikipedia for International Relations students may not be entirely helpful, therefore, students suggested enhancing the availability of International Relations related content, incorporating more credible references, especially from academic journals, and increasing the overall number of articles on relevant topics. They also recommended clearer tutorials for beginners to make contributions easier.

“International Relations students can play a role as contributors to Wikipedia, updating information related to constantly evolving global phenomena. They can also use Wikipedia as a platform to practice writing skills, which can be reflected in the writing of papers, journal articles, or theses.” - Sakila (IR UB student)

## **CONCLUSION**

Wikipedia is an established encyclopedia that serves as a powerful tool in contributing to democratizing knowledge for International Relations Studies. It provides an open access platform for students, scholars, and practitioners to contribute to a diverse array of global topics. Despite initial skepticism about its reliability, research has shown that Wikipedia can be a highly accurate resource. Over the years, Wikipedia has gained credibility as a commons for public fact-checking and has become more integrated with academic settings. One example is this case study involving members of the International Relations KlubWiki Universitas Brawijaya. Empowering International Relations students to contribute to Wikipedia can help bridge gaps in education while enhancing their critical thinking, writing skills, and research. Additionally, Wikipedia can help to understand global issues, through improvements in content depth and languages accessibility. Encouraging students to engage as contributors can enhance Wikipedia’s role in sharing accurate and diverse information, while allowing students to develop essential academic skills.

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