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Editorial

Nurse education today: Between teaching and publication focus
Joko Gunawan, Yupin Aunguroch, Mary L. Fisher

Original Research Article

Coping style, anxiety level, organizational support, and work commitment of educators during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines: A mixed-methods study
Norhidayah A. Aragasi, Hamdoni K. Pangandaman

Citizens' health practices during the COVID -19 pandemic in Indonesia: Applying the health belief model
Eko Winarti, Chatarina Umbul Wahyuni, Yohanes Andy Rias, Yudied Agung Mirasa, Sondang Sidabutar, Desi Lusiana Wardhani

Willingness of university nursing students to volunteer during the COVID-19 pandemic in Brunei Darussalam
Amal Atiqah Hamizah Hj Abdul Aziz, Khadizah H. Abdul-Mumin, Hanif Abdul Rahman

Assessment of the quality of independent nursing practice in Indonesia based on total quality management indicators
Devi Sahputra, Paul Lumbantobing, Cyrusz P. Tuppal

Illness cognition and depression among patients with coronary heart disease
Aan Nuraeni, Anastasia Anna, Atlastieka Praptiwi, Donny Nurhamsyah

Effect of care for child development training on cadres' knowledge, attitude, and efficacy in Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Akhmadi Akhmadi, Sunartini Sunartini, Fitri Haryanti, Ema Madyaningrum, Mei Neni Sitaresmi

Senior nurses' perceptions of essential soft skills for novice nurses in a private hospital in Jakarta, Indonesia: A phenomenological study
Emawati Emawati, Cicilia Nony Ayuningsih Bratajaya

Using a mobile application ("PrimaKu") to promote childhood immunization in Indonesia: A cross-sectional study
Nani Nurhaeni, Siti Chodidjah, Robiyatul Adawiyah, Astuti Astuti

Recovery from 'schizophrenia': Perspectives of mental health nurses in the Eastern island of Indonesia
Fandro Armando Tasijawa, Suryani Suryani, Titin Sutini, Sinthia Rosanti Maelissa

Case Study

The experience of older persons with mental health conditions who interact with healthcare robots and nurse intermediaries: The qualitative case studies
Tetsuya Tanioka, Feni Betriana, Tomoya Yokotani, Kyoko Osaka, Rozzano C. Locsin, Beth King, Savina Schoenhofer

Letter to Editors

Social stigma towards nurses: Time to refocus on what matters most
Yusrita Zolkefli



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Nurse education today: Between teaching and publication focus

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Abstract

"Publish or Perish" is no longer an imagination. On the contrary, it is considered a new reality in nursing education today. All nurse scholars, researchers, faculty members, and students are eager and compete with each other to publish their research works in academic journals. Success in this challenge brings personal benefits, especially for academic reputation and promotion, as well as organizational benefits, such as university ranking and sponsorship. However, despite the advantages of faculty publication, the pros and cons of this topic are on the rise. Therefore, this article aims to discuss the publication-related phenomenon in nursing education, followed by concerns and recommendations for consideration.

Keywords

nursing; education; publication; quality; sustainable development goals

Undoubtedly, in today's digital era, almost all aspects of our lives are affected by technology. In the majority of cases, this digital technology makes our lives easier or more efficient (Gunn, 2020). For example, in the educational aspect, we can learn online from anywhere. We will no longer be left uninformed for updated knowledge as long as we are connected to the Internet. In addition, it connects students and faculty members around the globe with new opportunities and collaborations. Like the publishing world, theses or dissertations that we could only read in a campus library in the past now can be easily accessed with just one click through Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) (Gunawan, 2018). Also, electronic newspapers, magazines, and journal articles are available with interactive designs and attractive reading formats. In other words, the technology brings benefits to the readers (with easy access), writers or authors (with broader reach), and publishers (with effective and efficient publishing cost).

But, despite all the benefits of the technology, we certainly need to be able to deal with its consequences, particularly related to data security, cybercrime, privacy, digital media population, work overload, etc. (Gunn, 2020). However, in this very article, we only focus on the impact of digital technology in nursing education, especially regarding "publish-or-perish."

"Publish or Perish" is not a new concept. It was initially coined by Coolidge (1932) as an attitude or practice existing within academic institutions, whereby researchers are put *under pressure* to produce journal publications (Rawat & Meena, 2014; Moosa, 2018). This issue is primarily relevant to those working in educational institutions (faculty members, academics, academic researchers, or just researchers) to retain their positions or be deemed successful (Rawat & Meena, 2014; Moosa, 2018).

However, the term *under pressure* or the notion of "Publish or Perish" creates pros and cons among scholars, and there does not seem to be a consensus. Therefore, this article aims to discuss journal publication, its benefits, and its related concerns and recommendations for consideration.

Publication Benefits

In this section, we describe publication advantages seen from the university level and individual level.

University level

Indeed, faculty and student publications in academic journals bring many benefits to the university. The number

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of publications is a measure of the institution's research activity and its capability in producing research publications at the international level (Moosa, 2018). Also, it has a significant impact on university rankings, such as QS and Times Higher Education (THE) Rankings. These rankings bring visibility to the university. The rankings are also used for the governments to measure the research excellence of the institution, for a company to select a university as a partner, and for a funding body's decision to invest in research at a university (Elsevier, 2021). In addition, the university ranking is mostly used as a criterion by parents and students (national and international students) when choosing a university (Elsevier, 2021). Therefore, each university provides tremendous efforts for its faculties to publish more articles to get higher rankings and become a world-class university. They do this mainly by their criteria for promotion and tenure.

Individual level

The impacts of publication on individuals can be seen at the faculty member level and student level. Unquestionably, the academic reputation of a faculty member is highly influenced by their publications today (Rawat & Meena, 2014). Without publication, no one knows our expertise because it is a way of communication among scientists. Publication, however, helps us become known as an expert in our field of the study.

In addition, the quantity and quality of published articles play a major role in faculty academic reputation. The number of articles is used when a tenure track is applied. The faculty member is required, for example, to publish two articles in two years of working experience to get promoted from lecturer to assistant professor position. And the quality of the article is seen from the citation number and the rank of the journal. Usually, to be a professor, each associate professor is required to publish two articles annually in the highest-rank journals. Some may require publications in Q1 Tier 1 journals, a textbook publication, and a number of citations on average, for example, more than 1000 references. Each university has its own criteria.

For students who would like to pursue higher education, the publication is one of the criteria to apply for a PhD program. Publications also help connect the students with scholars worldwide or partners to collaborate in research projects, seminars, conferences, and other educational events (Moosa, 2018). Moreover, many students who have a high number of publications before they graduate can make a working contract with a university or a company. Or, after they graduate, it is easy for them to find a teaching or researcher position. In other words, publishing is a new way of life among faculty members and students nowadays.

Publication Concerns

In this section, we discuss the disadvantages and concerns in the publication.

Publish or Perish

In spite of all the benefits of publication, there are still many universities, including their faculty members, who struggle to follow this requirement. For the university where the "publish or perish" culture does exist, it is not so hard for each faculty to go along because they have the same goal or a sense of purpose towards the university ranking. Publication rewards, mostly in terms of financial bonuses/incentives, are also available for each published article in exchange for the time and efforts the faculty members spend in academic writing and publishing.

In contrast, if a university is just about to begin creating the publication culture, it will be very challenging to compete with others. Many universities are *under pressure*, and they have been trying to encourage their faculties to conduct research and publish articles. Some universities provide a lot of financial supports and incentives received in the first place to motivate their employees and even offer non-money awards, such as traveling overseas and other rewards. Most public universities usually have funding support from their governments. For example, in Indonesia, the faculty members who publish an article in a Q1 journal will get approximately 3,500 USD or more. Those who get their papers published in Q2-Q4 journals get less than that (Ministry of Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, 2017). Yet, the outcomes are not that significant; some faculties are still stuck and stop writing and publishing. Financial or non-financial awards may not be served as a basis to support faculties to publish articles. This situation also differs in each department or faculty of a university. Some departments have no problem and enjoy extensive financial bonuses because their faculty members support each other to work and publish more articles, while some departments are still trying to publish articles.

In order to reach others' achievements, many universities, or many departments/faculties try to do other publishing strategies, such as conducting research and publication training, hiring scholars or researchers that focus on research and publication, collaborating with conferences in which submitted articles will be published in indexed proceedings or journals, and using publishing services. Tier-one universities often hire English language editors to assist faculty in their publications. These strategies may be effective in some ways. But the publication passion and culture may not exist among the faculty members.

In the worst scenarios, if those efforts do not bring good outcomes, many just publish articles in "predatory" or "poor quality" journals to reach a certain number of papers required by the university without further investigation as long as the article is published easily and quickly. Some may be aware but not even care, considering the "predatory" journal is defined differently (Grudniewicz et al., 2019). In the end, they are upset after they know that the journals that their articles get published are discontinued from Scopus or Web of Science. Based on data from Elsevier, Indonesian authors publishing in discontinued

journals happens across all subject areas, with a total of 27,082 documents during 2011-2020 (Chen, 2021).

The Increased Number of Academic Journals

No doubt, the number of academic journals is highly increased. Between August 2019 and August 2020, Scopus added 3.29 million new records (+4.15%). The current total number of records per August 2020 is 79.8 million (Aileen, 2020). In addition, there are more than 21,894 journals in the Web of Science Core Collection as of August 3, 2021 (Clarivate, 2021). This is a significant number of journals that influence the scientific movement worldwide. However, this number keeps increasing each year.

We notice some reasons why the number of journals or publishers increased. First, the number of journals in a specific field may be limited. Second, the Article Processing Charge (APC) for open access journals may be too high for students, around 1,000 to 4,000 USD or more. Although there are many free journals, they mostly use subscription models (no open access for the public), and the time from submission to publication may be too long (one to three years). Third, a business purpose. Some may see an opportunity to get more money from the APC of each article without considering the quality of the articles. It is noted that APC, in line with high quality and service (following publication ethics), is highly acceptable.

Additionally, in order to improve the visibility of the universities, many create their own journals, which also bring pros and cons. Positively, suppose a university has an academic journal. In that case, they can encourage and help their faculty members and students to publish in their journals, which may be considered one step of the academic publishing exercise. Many journals are also published in local languages. Once the articles are published, at least they have the visibilities in Google Scholar, respectively. It may have national and international impacts. In addition, to improve the quality of the journals, each country has its criteria. For example, in Indonesia, they have an accreditation body from the government to evaluate every year. However, each journal is competitively developing its quality for being indexed in reputable databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, Ovid, DOAJ, and others.

Negatively, the publication has an impact on the quality of higher education, especially for nursing education. To our knowledge, one university can create many journals, or each faculty develops one journal, and even in one faculty, each nursing program creates one. For instance, a pediatric nursing program creates a pediatric journal; a critical care nursing program makes a critical care nursing journal. It is a double burden for the faculty members. Instead of teaching, they are under pressure to spend their life conducting research, writing articles for promotion, and managing academic journals. There is a transition of the quality focus between teaching and publishing. This single-minded focus may cause faculty to neglect or be unable to

perform some other responsibilities (Rawat & Meena, 2014).

Misconduct Among Nursing Students

The negative impact of the notion of “publish or perish” can be seen from the cases of plagiarism, double publication, retraction, and other misconduct behaviors among students (Rawat & Meena, 2014; Gunawan, 2018). It is because many nursing students are now required to publish their works in international journals for graduation. At one point, it is an excellent step for publishing instead of only putting a thesis or a dissertation in a library. But, unfortunately, not all students could do it. The transformation of a 200-page thesis to be a 10-page article is not easy; it needs writing skills and passion. Many masters or doctoral nursing students are graduated late because of waiting for publication. In the majority of cases, they still need to pay tuition fees until the article is published online.

Besides, this is not the only case. Many diploma and bachelor nursing students, for example in Indonesia, are now demanded to go for publication too. This is another step of the misleading direction of the nursing institutions. Diploma nursing students mostly focus on clinical practice, while Bachelor nursing students may conduct mini-research for exercise, which most studies have low quality. Imagine if they are demanded to publish their works, the low-quality articles will be published and may negatively influence the credibility of the faculties and universities.

Predatory Journals

There is no golden standard to define a “predatory” journal. Although Jeffrey Beall was first coined the term “predatory” in 2010 (Beall, 2012) and has provided lists of publishers and journals in the past years; however, the way he evaluated the publishers and journals creates pros and cons because the decisions were not systematically explained (Chen, 2021). To our knowledge, it is somehow challenging to evaluate a publisher or a journal. A critical analysis is needed.

Understandably, a journal or a publisher may not perform excellent editorial management in the first year, as they are looking for a certain number of articles to meet the criteria for indexing. Many journals email and call prospective authors for submission and offer fast-track reviews (mostly only editorial review and single-blind review) or even fast-track publication, which is inappropriate in terms of publication ethics. Therefore, to be indexed in reputable databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and DOAJ, one or two years minimum criteria of a journal publication history is required (Elsevier, n.d.), and their evaluation takes one to two years to complete.

Besides, although a journal has been indexed in those databases, it does not guarantee its quality. Many journals, after being included in Scopus and Web of Science or being a member of COPE (the Committee of Publication Ethics), their behaviors are very deviant. For example, as far as we know, a journal that usually publishes ten or 20 articles in

one issue is changed to publish 100 to 500 articles per issue, or from 60 to 1000 articles per year, with questionable peer review.

There are common red flags to identify “predatory” journals. Red flags are clues, not necessarily evidence, of predatory activity (Chen, 2021). The typical red flags include fake impact factors, incorrect addresses, misrepresentations of the editorial board, false claims of indexing or membership of associations and misleading, little or no information about editorial and peer review process, absent contact information, no details about article processing charges, and editors and editorial board members are often unverifiable (Grudniewicz et al., 2019; Chen, 2021). An unprofessional-looking web page – with irrelevant text is also considered a red flag (Grudniewicz et al., 2019; Chen, 2021). Repeated emails sending an invitation for submission, which the journal scopes are out of areas of authors’ expertise (Grudniewicz et al., 2019; Chen, 2021). Also, many journals publish articles faster within one to two weeks as long as the authors pay a certain amount of money or article processing charge. Therefore, we need to be careful with this kind of journal behavior and regularly check the discontinued Scopus lists to ensure that the journals are still included, and importantly, the contents of the published articles should be evaluated. “Predatory” journals are a global threat (Grudniewicz et al., 2019), and they keep growing and continually changing their names and journals (Chawla, 2021), as they have found ways to be indexed in reputable databases (Grudniewicz et al., 2019).

Recommendations

Our position to honor the “publish or perish” culture is valid, but it should be done differently. In this section, we provide four recommendations considering the push to publications’ concerns and disadvantages.

First, there should be no conflict between teaching and publishing focus. The faculty members have a huge responsibility to teach nursing students in order to be competent registered nurses, especially in the bachelor and diploma nursing programs. Research and publication should not be their focus; instead, clinical skills should be a priority. For the master nursing program, each student only has two years of education (with four semesters); therefore, conducting promising research and publishing their work is challenging. It is because they spend one year on coursework and another year on the thesis. From our experience, mostly the students pass the proposal in the third and fourth semesters, but only a few complete it on time. Imagine if the university is required to publish their works in an international journal; indeed, they will spend at least one more year waiting for the publishing process. It is rare to find the Scopus or Web of Science journals publish an article within a month unless it is a “predatory” journal without peer review.

Besides, it is different from a doctoral program or PhD, in which its program is a research focus. Although some

institutions provide one year of course works and two years of research, the students can publish any parts of their research development, from concept development, literature review, instrument development/modification/translation, and main results of their study. However, not all students can do that; dealing with a qualifying exam and proposal defense makes them stressful enough. Another challenge is that a publication in a Scopus or Web of Science indexed journal is mandatory for graduation. Some universities have specific criteria of journals for publication to avoid “predatory” journals. The ranking of journals for students varies depending on their funding supports or scholarships. Some require Q1 journals, some only Scopus-indexed journals, regardless of the journal ranking. Also, some require one article, some need two or three articles. There is no universal standard for this issue, and it needs further exploration.

However, it is also challenging for the students to manage their time critically. Most of them are not possible to finish their study in three years, on average in four to six years. In addition, it leads to another issue, a tuition fee. Some universities still require the students to pay the fees (we are unable to provide the names of the universities, but it happens). However, in this case, the students should not pay any tuition fees because they are just waiting for the publication, and mostly they do not attend university and are back to work already.

Second, creating many journals in a university is not a necessity. We will not turn a university position into a publisher position; both have different purposes. Establishing many journals should not be a shortcut for increasing article production for a specific university or country. Our position on this point is not to forbid any universities to develop an academic journal, as long as they could balance between the quality of education (including the quality of teaching among faculty members) and the publication management. Many universities have the same human resources to teach, research, write and publish articles, as well as manage the journals. Adding other human resources to focus on journal publishing would be helpful without obstructing the teaching performance.

Third, publication ethics should be emphasized among faculty members and nursing students. To our knowledge, many nursing students, due to running with the time, often do double submission—submitting the same article at the same time to two or three journals (Gunawan, 2018). This unethical behavior may occur because they do not know, or they may be aware, but time is up. Unfortunately, this often results in a double publication, which leads to retraction and influences the university’s reputation and threat to be blacklisted in some journals.

In addition, many students or faculty members try to contact and negotiate with the editors about fast-track reviews and publications, resulting in immediate rejections. Instead of asking, the students could check the turn-around time (from submission to publication) average in the journal info or the published articles. Also, the publication ethics

related to plagiarism, self-citations, and other unethical behaviors should be highly emphasized.

Fourth, the notion of “publish or perish” should not be described as “under pressure,” but rather as culture, passion, encouragement, empowerment, motivation, and invitation of individuals to publish their works. However, it should be applied on many levels. For example, beginners or junior faculty members may need a collaborating team and a longer time to write or rework an article to be ready for publication. In addition, they may need some time to balance their works. In contrast, experts, or senior faculty members, may have some targets per year, either work individually or in a team. They also need to spare their time to empower the young generation to create the publication “passion” culture.

Conclusion

The discussion related to publication benefits, concerns, and recommendations in this article are authentically based on the author's perspectives. However, the quality of nursing education should be highly prioritized. Teaching, research, and publication should align in harmony in order to reach the goals, either to be a world-class university or to produce competent and professional nurses. We should learn to trust every process; there is no shortcut by neglecting other responsibilities and focusing only on publishing. This applies to all elements, university level, faculty member, and students. We had better run slowly but with the proper process, rather than running faster but breaking all principles and goals. Lastly, we expect all nursing education worldwide to focus on good quality education to achieve sustainable development goals and ensure professional nurses are produced to serve communities.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed equally to this study.

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