

Research Misconducts: A Key Challenge in Academics and Publication

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Abstract: *Various misconducts have posed serious threats to the field of academics and research in today's time. In spite of UGC's CARE listed journals, predatory journals have remained a serious issue. Data fabrication, falsification and different forms of plagiarism have become very common in research. Simultaneous and duplicate publications as well as salami slicing need to be controlled so that pure research is encouraged. Self-citation has become a regular practice for increasing the citation index. Ghost writers, guest writers and gift writers have already polluted the environment of academics and innovation. It is high time that preventive measures should be taken against the malpractices so that academic and research integrity is maintained. Many faculties and research scholars have fallen prey to these unethical practices. The present paper discusses the misconducts in research in detail and makes future researchers cautious about the malpractices that exist in the world of publication. It also expects the policy makers to introduce research ethics at school level so that the research values are instilled among the future researchers at an early age. Systematic implementation of the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 should help to eradicate some of the misconducts prevalent in the field of higher education, research and publication.*

Keywords: Academic Publications, Ethics, Plagiarism, Predatory Journals, Research Misconducts

Introduction

Modern communication technology has made man's life easy, comfortable, luxurious and fast-paced but at the cost of ethics and morality. The technology has given rise to multiple types of misbehaviors and misconducts in almost every aspect of human life. Research is all about honesty, integrity, originality and the creation of new knowledge. However, these values are missing from the field of research and publication today. The communication technology has made us feel skeptical about publication ethics observed in the field of higher education. Unfortunately, the copy paste culture is encouraged in India from school level only, when the teachers give assignments like writing essays and projects. The children copy the text and images from the internet and submit the projects. This not only kills their creativity and power of imagination but teaches them, that there is nothing wrong in copying something from the internet and claiming as their own. The same children, in later life, do not fear to plagiarize and get their research published. The easy access of all types of data on the internet has given birth to varied kinds of misconducts in the field of publication.

Research Misconducts

One of the serious threats to the world of publication is proliferation of predatory journals. These journals compromise with the quality of research and charge fees for publications. Publication is a means of earning huge amount of money and profit for them. They are least bothered about the quality of research. They do not have any monitoring system to check the quality of research papers and prevent publication of the low standard. They create lots of scope for the publication of plagiarized literature and are not bothered about following publication ethics like peer review. The faculties and the researchers are very desperate to publish their papers since it is a prerequisite for the award of Ph.D.; and in Career Advancement Schemes (CAS), they are the real victims of the predatory journals. Sometimes they are not very confident about the standard of their own research, so somehow want to get their papers published. The sub quality research is published in the predatory journals. Genuine researchers too due to their ignorance of the quality journals, fall victims to this and later get frustrated when they understand that their work is published in a predatory journal. Most of the publications in the predatory journals create confusions, and promote substandard scholarship, and waste resources. Bhushan Patwardhan, the Vice Chairman of University Grants Commission (UGC), writes, "According to 2015 estimates, more than 8,000 predatory journals churn out more than 400,000 items a year, and India-which has also seen a spurt in high-quality scientific publications-contributes more than one-third of the articles in predatory journals" (2019, p. 7). It is found that around 51% of the faculty members and 32% doctoral students have published their research works in the predatory journals. Day by day, the number

of predatory journals is increasing. To overcome this problem UGC has launched Consortium for Academic Research and Ethics (CARE). The CARE's objective is to promote quality and original research, publication ethics and academic integrity amongst the students and faculties of Indian educational institutes. It announces the list of the quality journals every quarter. The faculties and researchers are supposed to publish their work in these journals. The CARE listed journals do not compromise with quality publication. The peer teams of the journals review the research articles, they do the plagiarism check and only then the articles are published. Although the UGC is taking all kinds of efforts to maintain academic integrity, predatory journals remain a serious challenge in the field of academics and research.

According to American Psychological Association, "Research misconduct occurs when a researcher fabricates or falsifies data, or plagiarizes information or ideas within a research report"(2022, para. 1). Not only stealing the data and ideas but breaching the confidentiality in the case of research, authorship and publication is also misconduct. In today's time plagiarism has become a sever misconduct in the field of research and academics. Data fabrication and falsification, duplicate publication, salami slicing, self-citation are some of the various forms of publication misconduct and plagiarism. Fabrication in publication is making up results of the research and reporting them. It is construction of the data that was never found in the research or experiment. Sometimes when the researcher assumes certain things and comes to conclusion on the basis of the incomplete data, it is fabrication of the data. In falsification the research material, equipment or processes are manipulated so that the results support the claims and the hypotheses made by the researcher. Sometimes, the data is fabricated and falsely represented to prove the hypotheses and draw the conclusions that the researchers or the research funding agencies want. This is a big fraud in the field of research. It is very harmful, especially in clinical research as it can mislead the research community and directly affect the lives of millions of people.

Yam Bahadur Roka writes, "The commonest form of plagiarism is of text known as "copy-cut-paste" or "word-to-word" writing wherein complete sentences, paragraphs, tables or even pictures are reproduced without acknowledgement" (2017, p. 3). People copy somebody else's text and publish it as their own. Sometimes they paraphrase it, or copy literally wherein words and phrases are taken as they are in the original texts infringing the copyrights. The genuine researcher's work is claimed and stolen by somebody else. This demotivates the original researchers and encourages the pseudo researchers.

Another type of misconduct that happens in the field of research is submitting a research paper to multiple journals for publication. It is called simultaneous submission. The same paper gets published in more than one journal. This happens because after submission, the researcher has to wait for two to three months for getting the positive reply from the editor or publisher. The researcher is also very anxious and concerned whether his/her paper will get published. He/she does not want to waste time and fall victim to the issue of simultaneous submission. There is also something called duplicate or redundant publication. When an author uses the same hypothesis, data, discussion points and conclusions used in his/her earlier published study, and presents it as a new one in a new manuscript and gets it published, it is called duplicate publication. This is a serious misconduct. In fact, once the hypothesis, data and conclusions are already published, they become the property of the editor. Therefore, the author does not have any copyright to republish the same work. Sometimes, minor changes are made in already published work and it is republished. When an author does this, he/she is actually cheating the research community. Duplicate publication does not fit in the publication ethics.

Like simultaneous or duplicate publication, salami publication or salami slicing is also a major problem in publication. In salami publication which is also called segmented publication, the author republishes his own research work in parts from the already published work. In this, one research study is split in many parts and then published by the author. Data collected from a single study is sliced into several segments. Therefore, it is also called segmented publication. Many a times to present the data in the simplest possible way, the author focuses on simple hypothesis and simply on his/her findings by splitting the results drawn out of a study. He/she uses the same hypothesis, the same methodology or the same results in more than one publication. The simultaneous, redundant or duplicate publication and the salami publication are the examples of self-plagiarism as the author is publishing his/her own work again. This is done by the author so systematically that there is no similarity in the text and that is why the computer software cannot detect the plagiarism. Salami publications give undeserved credit to the authors and mislead the research community as

the author gets credit for a single study two to three times. Salami publication represents dishonesty and it violates copyright too. This is a serious misconduct in the field of academics and research and is considered an unethical practice.

However, all the salami publications are not considered as misconduct. In some cases, the salami publication is allowed. For instance, the manuscripts taken from the same or similar patient sample could be published in two different journals, if it is intended for different readers. Although the data is collected from the same patient sample, each research article should contribute something new to the knowledge. Ideally in this type of salami publication, the author should give all the necessary information to the publisher or the editor. In short, salami publication is good only in limited situations. If the researchers or faculty are taking undue advantage of it for getting more and more credits for the sake of career advancement, this is a serious threat to the field of research and academics as it does not add any knowledge but degrades the value of research. Self-citation is another misconduct wherein the researchers cite their own past work in their research papers. Sometimes, the earlier published work is cited even if it does not fit into the given context. This is done by the authors to increase their citation index to increase their value as researchers.

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An author is a person who makes a very valuable contribution to the field of study. In this case, the author and the researcher are the same. However, there are certain authors or writers who provide writing services for research papers and thesis writing to other people by charging fees. In this case the original writer is different from the person who claims to be the writer. The names of the original writers are completely hidden from the public. They are not acknowledged anywhere in the work. These writers are called 'ghost authors'. Jeffrey R. Lacasse writes, "One of the hidden secrets of the medical literature is that the named authors on a paper's byline, particularly in the case of clinical trials, are not necessarily the individuals who write the paper. It is not uncommon for pharmaceutical companies, or medical product manufacturers to write their own papers and then find university professors to agree to be the named authors of the paper" (2014, p. 802). This is how the ghost writers are used by the big corporate companies to advertise their medical products. Sadly, this kind of unethical practice puts the human life in great risk. The researchers who do not have a very good command over the languages or the subjects under study, hire the services of the ghost writers. Research is a process and a researcher learns a lot in the act of researching and reporting the research in the form of writing. Ghost writing stops the growth of the researcher and leads to substandard research as the ghost writer may not be a specialist in the concerned field of research. The content of the work that he writes could be far different from the real research work. The researcher who is hiring the services is not bothered about what goes on in the paper or thesis. He/she is more eager to get published.

There is also something called 'guest authors'. Here, the guest author is a reputed personality from the field. He/ she is an influential and established writer but does not contribute much in the actual research. His/her name appears in the list of the authors so that the chances of publication increase. These kinds of unethical networks are very damaging for the growth of pure research. The third malpractice in authorship is 'gift authorship'. It is inclusion of the names of supervisors or superiors in the list of authors of research papers simply because the research scholar is working under their guidance at a research center. This practice too is unethical as the actual research is done by the scholar and the credit is shared with the supervisors.

In the field of research when some of the institutions provide grants for particular research, the conflict of interest can occur. When an author or the institution of the author has a relationship, financial or otherwise, with individuals or organizations, that could influence the author's work inappropriately, it is called conflict of interest. In this case, when an agency provides funds to the researcher for doing particular research, the researcher may come under the influence of the agency and may manipulate or may be asked to manipulate the results of the study. This compromise is a conflict of interest which keeps away the researcher from being unbiased and subjective. The researcher loses his independence and falls victim to the unethical practices. This is a serious threat to the field of research.

The values like ethical behavior and right conduct should be inculcated amongst children during the schooling by schools as well as families. However, this does not seem to be happening. Therefore, only the stringent penal actions can prevent the misconducts in academics and research. The policy makers can take effective measures and stop the misconducts in the academics and research. 'No compromise on quality and excellence' policy can actually help the higher education system in India to produce quality research and strengthen the education system. Ceceilia Parnter writes, "Higher education leaders must consider the

scholarship on academic integrity in order to make effective changes to policy and prevention. Research on academic integrity education offers interventions that can assist administrators in cultivating communities that discourage academic misconduct and promote integrity” (2020, p. 26). The New Education Policy (2020) is emphasizing on the quality research and education. It has envisioned establishing a National Research Foundation (NRF) to promote quality research across all the disciplines in the universities and higher education institutions in India. The NRF will set up a system that will peer-review the research projects on the basis of merit and provide funding. The young, aspirant and active researchers will be provided guidance of the eminent research scholars from their fields. The outstanding research work will be recognized and appreciated. This can strengthen the original research culture and curb the malpractices in the field of research and publication to some extent. (p. 46)

Conclusion

There have been many ethical issues that the authors must consider while publishing their research. They should see the authenticity of the journals that they are going to publish in. They should not plagiarize. The researcher should see to it that he/she does not copy literally or paraphrase somebody else's ideas and content and publishes as his/her own. He/she should avoid simultaneous publication and should have patience to wait before submitting the same manuscript of the paper to two different journals at the same time. He/she should also avoid duplicate publication in which the hypothesis, data, discussions points and conclusions of the earlier published paper are kept as the same, and the paper is published in the form of a new manuscript. The researcher should never manipulate, fabricate or falsify the data for proving their hypotheses. He/she should not publish one meaningful paper by slicing it into more than one paper. He/she should be aware of the unethical practice of self-citation and should avoid that. The budding researchers should keep themselves away from these kinds of misconducts that breach the ethics of publication. If the researchers decide to follow the principle of being honest and fair in all aspects of research and take responsibility for their research study, they need not to worry about any kind of intentional or unintentional misconduct in publication. It is the responsibility of the policy makers that they inculcate the research ethics amongst children and youngsters from the school level only. They should be taught what is right and what is wrong when they prepare for writing assignments and projects. They should learn how to think creatively based on the research of others to lead to the genuine research. Unless the values and ethics of research are inculcated from the young age, the external controls will not prevent the misconducts in research and publication.

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BIO-NOTE

Dr. Shriram Trimbak Dongre holds a Ph.D. Degree in English from the University of Mumbai. He was awarded UGC-Teachers Fellowship for two years to complete his Ph.D. **Dr. Shriram** did his Post Graduation Diploma in Educational Administration (PGDEA) from Symbiosis, Pune and Post Graduation Certificate in Teaching of English (PGCTE) from EFLU, Hyderabad. He has been teaching English literature, Communication Skills in English and Business Communication at graduate level for the last thirteen years.