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Awareness of predatory publishing for Peruvian university professors and lecturers doing research

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ABSTRACT

Predatory open access journals and predatory conferences' main purpose is to make profit rather than promoting good science. In Peru, the University Law 30220 asks that professors and lecturers undertake research duties at universities. Hence, nowadays part of this academic staff is required to write scientific articles. However, not all of them are experienced on how to write a scholarly paper. Thus, in the rush to comply with the publication requirements that their individual institutions demand from them, a great number of these professors and lecturers are likely to fall prey of predatory publishing, which already is happening in other developing nations. This publishing method is not only unethical because it produces low-quality articles but also is an egregious mismanagement of the resources that universities allocate to fund research. Moreover, the time and effort that the academic staff put to the production of low-quality papers also completely go to waste. Professors and lecturers who follow these bad practices should be penalized; this also avoids the emergence of fraudulent research authorities. Thus, vice-rectorates for research in Peruvian universities should take corrective or preventive measures to promote the production of high-quality papers by part of their academic staff.

KEYWORDS

Predatory publishing;
professors and lecturers;
measures; research ethics;
low quality papers;
fraudulent researchers

It is well known in the literature that there exist predatory open access journals (POAJ) whose main goal is to make a profit rather than promoting the publication of good quality scientific articles (e.g., Beall 2012, 2015; Negahdary 2017; Demir 2018). One of the most important features of manuscripts submitted to POAJ is that they do not follow an effective peer review process or even in some cases this is non-existent (Dadkhah, Lagzian, and Borchardt 2017). As a consequence papers published in POAJ are considered junk science and very likely not to be cited in manuscripts submitted to legitimate journals (Memon 2018). Additionally, in recent years predatory conferences without any of the traits of a proper scholarly meeting (e.g., discussions of the state-of-art of a certain research field among peers and

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encouragement of the formation of research networks) have started to appear around the globe (Sonne et al. 2020). As with POAJ, the main purpose of this type of conferences is to make money (Asadi et al. 2018; Sonne et al. 2020) and publish low-quality papers due to their inadequate peer review (Teixeira da Silva, Sorooshian, and Al-Khatib 2017). Consequently, it is not only a waste of time preparing these junk papers but also a waste of the researchers' or their institutions' resources that goes into paying fees for publication and in the cases of predatory conferences additional travel costs.

In 2014, the Ministry of Education (MINEDU) from Peru launched its University Law 30220 that among its different objectives has established research as a compulsory activity in all its 91 universities (at the moment of this writing), which are licensed by the national regulatory organism of higher education, SUNEDU (in Spanish: Superintendencia Nacional de Educación Superior Universitaria). This obligation to licensed universities is clearly stated in the article 48 of the Law 30220 (MINEDU 2014). Furthermore, in article 79 it is highlighted that professors and lecturers at Peruvian universities among its many duties have to do research. This Peruvian university law seeks that research becomes one of the cornerstones to ensure quality of education at universities. Hence, an intense campaign has started in the majority of universities to increment their numbers of published scientific articles. This has brought about that a great number of these universities nowadays ask their academic staff (i.e., professors and lecturers) to produce scholarly papers.

According to the article 82 from the University Law 30220 to be a professor or lecturer at a university, professionals have to possess at least a master's degree in the case of teaching at an undergraduate level and a doctoral degree to teach at a post-graduate level (MINEDU 2014). For the Peruvian academic staff that had the opportunity to do post-graduate studies (either a master's or a doctoral degree) overseas in a developed country (e.g., Australia, Canada, Germany, Great Britain, Japan, Netherlands, and the United States of America) the task of writing scholarly papers is not a very complex one; either because they had to read a significant quantity of scientific articles in English during their post-graduate studies or had to write at least one to complete such a degree, in English as well. Furthermore, the mere fact that they read and write works at this academic level and also communicate with their peers in English over the duration of their studies abroad makes them much more proficient at this language, which is extremely helpful when preparing and submitting papers to legitimate journals or conferences. On the other hand, a great part of the academic staff working at Peruvian universities could not follow such a path, meaning that they could not do post-graduate studies overseas in a developed country but nevertheless manage to complete either a master's or a doctoral degree in Peru. However, how master's and doctoral studies are

handled in many Peruvian universities is not the same as in universities of developed nations, where post-graduate students are devoted full time to their studies. In Peru, several universities offer post-graduate studies that can be taken over the weekends or maybe a couple of hours during nighttime over the 5-day normal working week. This approach to post-graduate studies in Peru is to facilitate, to those interested, obtaining such a degree, but this aid unfortunately has as a consequence that post-graduate students are not properly involved in research and therefore do not realize the amount of work that entails to do a high-quality paper. In some cases, it is not even necessary to publish a paper to complete a master's or a doctoral degree in Peru.

Due to the pressure of publishing that is occurring at the moment in several Peruvian universities, those professors and lecturers inexperienced at writing a scholarly paper are quite likely to become prey of predatory publishing. It is not that they want to publish in POAJ and/or predatory conferences, but in searching for a shortcut to meet the research duties their higher education institutions demand from them and for fear of losing their jobs if they do not reach this goal, some of them are forced to follow these unethical practices of publishing. A clear example can be provided by Demir (2018), where some of the participants of his study from different universities in Turkey declared that they saw themselves pressured to publish in POAJ because of fear of losing their jobs, either because the publication of an article was part of a funded project that was going to end soon or because they needed a publication before the end of their contracts. Furthermore, in the aforementioned study is also indicated that Nigeria (a developing nation) is the second country worldwide with the highest number of publications in predatory journals. Thus, it is quite likely that similar situations would arise in Peruvian universities if corrective or preventive measures are not accordingly taken.

As previously mentioned, the consequence of publishing in POAJ and/or predatory conferences is that low-quality papers are not only being constantly churned out (Beall 2012, 2015), but the resources that universities allocate for research purposes are badly mismanaged as well (Resnik 2019). The squandering of money that goes into paying fees for publishing in POAJ and/or predatory conferences in developing countries like Peru is something to which sanctions must be imposed. As Resnik (2019) points out, it is not only money that is being misused but also the time and effort that this academic staff put into producing these low-quality works that go into waste. Supporting predatory publishing further either in public or private Peruvian universities shows as well a lack of respect to Peruvian taxpayers, the families of university students and the students themselves whose part of their financial contribution to the state or directly to the universities end up funding these fishy research articles.

Another disturbing fact of predatory publishing has been indicated by Eriksson and Helgesson (2017) who have warned against the emergence of false academic research authorities. As a research culture is slowly starting to build up in Peru some professors and lecturers might believe that those who publish a significant number of papers per year are the *crème de la crème* of the research Peruvian community; however, it would be an interesting exercise to vet if these published papers are indeed published in high-quality journals and trusted conferences or they appear in POAJ and/or predatory conferences.

So how is it possible to spread knowledge on predatory publishing among Peruvian university professors and lecturers? Here some solutions are suggested:

- There are tools online that provide lists of predatory journals and publishers, for instance: the Beall's list (<https://beallist.net>), whose last update was in December 2019, and the website Stop Predatory Journals (<https://predatoryjournals.com>).
- There are also international initiatives such as the website Think.Check.Submit (<https://thinkchecksubmit.org>) which assists and educates in identifying well-established journals and publishers in order to promote reliable research and publications.
- Visiting as well the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), which maintains a directory of high-quality open access journals.
- In regard to predatory conferences, there is not still a list online, but Peruvian researchers who already fell prey to that type of conferences should communicate these to their peers and encourage them to disseminate further the existence of these shady events with their colleagues (i.e., word of mouth). Or vice versa, professors and lecturers new to research should ask senior colleagues if they could suggest them a good scholarly meeting to send their work.
- Trusted conferences indicate also in their websites that the accepted papers for presentation will be published in curated repositories such as Web of Science or Scopus.
- Finally, by organizing periodically seminars and/or conferences about bad publishing practices and writing guidelines (given by the vice-rectorates for research) to prevent these.

The heads at the vice-rectorates for research in Peruvian universities should penalize those professors and lecturers that publish in POAJ and/or predatory conferences. This is because part of the resources used for this purpose should be put to much better use by training those inexperienced professors and lecturers in how a proper high-quality research is carried out and also by improving research laboratories in universities with better equipment and

materials to reach that goal. Peruvian professors and lecturers, who insist on publishing in POAJ and/or predatory conferences, should either be demoted from their current positions or not be allowed to go further in the academic ladder (Moher et al. 2017). These university research bodies should as well constantly scrutinize what and where their academic staff is publishing. Future efforts by part of the vice-rectorates for research should be to focus on evaluating the quality of papers that their professors and lecturers are publishing and where needed take corrective or preventive actions (like the solutions suggested above). This type of measures and others are the only way to put research in Peru on the right path of publishing high-quality papers in high-quality journals or at trusted conferences; it has very recently been indicated that Peru has a great potential to do research (Bajak 2019). Moreover, as good research is paramount to innovation, and this is key for the economic growth of a country (Damanpour and Wischnevsky 2006), it is expected that by taking care of that research is properly carried out at Peruvian universities we will see in years to come that Peru will have the opportunity to become more than its current status, that of an emerging economy (Bolaños et al. 2015).

Disclosure statement

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