

Guide, Co-guide, Supervisors as Author in Publication on Student Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Good research writing and publication practices are important to identify, acknowledge, and generate awareness for ethical and credible science. Academic requirement for research thesis, and 'publish or perish' culture of academia for career evaluation of faculties contribute to authorship misconducts. The authorship criteria have been clearly outlined by international guidelines like International Committee of Medical Journals Editors, Committee on Publication Ethics, Council of Science Editors, World Association of Medical Editors. However, the practice of guide, co-guide as authors in students' thesis articles continues as inappropriate authorship. This is a topic which requires more debate in academia. Historical practices of academia, the power dynamics, and the guidelines of the journals vary and make this dispute even more complicated. In Nepal, we need to expand the discussion among stakeholders from academia, universities, monitoring bodies, ethical committees to journals for a consensus; to 'put to rest' this issue and be in line with the international guidelines.

Keywords: Authorship guideline; journal article publication; research thesis guide co-guide supervisor

INTRODUCTION

Universities require thesis and articles for masters and Ph.D. and MCh (Master of Chirurgiae) and other master degrees. The authorship criteria by international guidelines like Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), Council of Science Editors (CSE), World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), or International Committee of Medical Journals Editors (ICMJE) are widely followed and acceptable. The inappropriate authorship for listing guide, co-guide, and supervisor in the articles from students' thesis continues. The answer is not clearly demarcated. The different practices by academia, the power dynamics, and varying guidelines by journals require discussion for a consensus.

IMPORTANCE of AUTHORSHIP

There are clear authorship criteria for research writing and publications of articles, for example, COPE, CSE, WAME, or ICMJE guidelines adopted by most journal publishers.¹ Whether students can include supervisors as co-authors on the paper is a question of interest and dispute. The situation varies from social sciences to natural sciences for author byline, but the baseline for authorship is to have made a substantive and verifiable contribution and not for the acquisition of funding or general supervision for honorary authors, and

authorship misconducts.² The 'publish or perish' culture in academia for career evaluation is an important contributor to authorship misconduct.³ Good Publication Practices (GPP) and education are important to identify, acknowledge, and generate awareness for ethical practice and credibility of scientific publications.³

ISSUE of GUIDE, CO-GUIDE AUTHORSHIP

Honorary authorship (guest authorship or gift authorship) inappropriately lists a particular name due to the power dynamics between students and their guide, co-guide, supervisor; or to improve their chances of publication. The scenario varies widely: from supervisors as co-authors on every paper, or even as the main author.¹

The ICMJE requires ALL four criteria to be met, and the 4th point was added for accountability that states 'everyone who is listed as an author should be able to defend the paper as a whole'.⁴ Trying to 'fit' the supervisors for 'significant scientific contribution' to meet the 4-criteria should neither be based on general supervision at some point (with varied participation) nor for corrections here and there. This is a part of supervision and mentoring, which should not be the basis for 'authorship'. Acknowledging the supervisor or others for significant contribution (but not enough for authorship) should suffice.⁵ This is a collective responsibility for all (the

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authors, editors, and reviewers, publishers, academia) to follow the best practice and ethical standards for accurate, clear, reproducible, unbiased publication of journal articles. Authorship provides credit and carries accountability which demands familiarity and verifiable contribution with all the contents.

There should be a disclosure that the article is based on the thesis and guide co-guide may be listed in the acknowledgment section for their contribution. Poor research culture, unawareness, or being indifferent to authorship requirements are possible reasons in this part of the world why guide co-guide as an author. There are extremes, for e.g., thesis proposal submitted to the ethical committee in the name of guide to make for listing as author distorting the norms of research ethics because thesis is the requirement for a academic degree and guide will not be penalized for their if proposal or thesis is not approved.

POTENTIAL MISUSE of AUTHORSHIP for GUIDE CO-GUIDE

Authorship problems are common and threaten the integrity of scientific research and publication.⁶ Inappropriate authors (Guest Authorship, Honorary or Gift Authorship, Ghost Authorship, Authorship for Sale, Group Authorship, Deceased or Incapacitated Authors) and the issues of the order of listing, and responsibilities (Confidentiality, Originality, Disclosures, Copyright Assignment) and publication issues (Multiple Submissions, Salami Slicing, Dual publication, Plagiarism, Copyright) are some of the issues that should be considered.^{6,7}

Authorship is a touchy subject. The graduate students and/or research fellows working with the guide, co-guide, supervisor who secure or provide funding and resources are some of the reasons why supervisors appear as coauthors, and also the departments and universities have practices to include the whole team as authorship.^{8,9} The ideas may be from the supervisor but ideas are not of much worth unless proven and validated in a lengthy work process of research, writing, and publication.

Having an agreement in writing or recording from all involved parties in advance, and not just before the submission for a journal, is important. Here, the research students have to navigate through the power dynamics. The reliability of the authorship disclosure form was found to be unreliable in 2/3^d of cases in a study of published articles in which the corresponding author was

first sent the checklist for all listed authors, and later individually to each author.¹⁰ The socio-psychological factors affect the declaration for authorship practices.

WAY FORWARD for NEPAL

The practice varies between academia and journals in different disciplines for the practice of including guide, co-guide, supervisor, and bosses as a coauthor or even as a lead author despite the international ethical guidelines on authorship. We need to discuss this issue and work towards consensus practice guidelines in Nepal to minimize the misconduct of authorship.

Appropriating others' thesis for a price, on any subject except science, was found to be a thriving market in Nepal, the so-called 'Xeroxed knowledge'.¹¹

In line with the international ethical guidelines and practices, giving up the practice of listing supervisors, as coauthors should be put to rest for the publication based on research thesis work. The article based on the completed thesis is the work of the student who is also a researcher. The topic of whether a thesis can be converted into an article for publication is another topic of debate and demands different forums of discussion. In Nepal, most journals allow this with a declaration that the work was based on the thesis. The research thesis is always based on a proposal approved by the ethical committee in which only the student is listed as a researcher and should remain so. Guide, co-guide, and supervisor are duly acknowledged in the thesis and should be maintained even during the time of journal submission.

The exception can be for the article published before the completion of the thesis. For reporting of significant findings or additional components other than the earlier approved proposal should apply for a separate ethical approval, again acknowledging that this is related (in part) to the earlier approved thesis proposal and provide a rationale why it is planned as another research publication. Here, guide, co-guide, and supervisor may be listed as co-researcher and later as coauthors if they fulfill authorship criteria. Such prior research article publication requires acknowledgment in the final thesis.

The authorship issues may be due to deliberate intent or lack of knowledge. The Nepal Health Research Council may take the lead to bring together the institutions and journal editors and authors for a consensus on this controversial yet important issue to minimize scientific misconduct of inappropriate authorship.

CONCLUSIONS

The issue of authorship is an ongoing debate. The practice of automatically listing guides, co-guide, the supervisor as co-authors, or even lead authors in journal article publications should be put to rest. It is worthwhile that the stakeholders from academia, universities, monitoring bodies, ethical committees to journals; who share a common goal; start discussions to come to a consensus and develop guidelines in local scenarios.

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