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Contents   Page

Lecturers Publishing Students' Research: An Authorship Policy Gap

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to derive a possible policy to guide authorship of students' research from their supervised research projects. It was motivated by the fact that universities have no policy to cater for the publication of students' research. Unscrupulous supervisors have published such research acknowledging the student as second or third author. At times the student is not even acknowledged. The study used descriptive surveys in which data were collected from cluster samples (n = 204) of undergraduate and masters students as well as lecturers from one university in Zimbabwe. Comments were also captured from students and staff web portal. Interviews and focus group discussions were applied to validate findings. The study found that participants want students' research projects published and each student be acknowledged as the principal author of any paper derived from such individual research. The student can have the supervisor as co-author if the supervisor contributed significantly to the authorship of the published paper, not for the project supervision. The study recommends a policy in which universities can consider the publication of students' research projects as part of their research policy agenda.

Introduction

Suggestions for the solution of university lecturers' low research output in Zimbabwe have come from different angles. Hill (2000) called for a clearly defined university research policy. Nherera (2000) and Chinamasa (2012) called for university lecturers research mentoring programs but did not provide a mentoring model for lecturer research skills development. Jingura (2010) suggested two operational strategies. Firstly, lecturers were advised to use their masters' research projects as a diving board from which they can derive a publishable

paper. Alternatively, lecturers can derive publishable papers from the research projects of students that they supervised. To this end, lecturers can tactfully focus students to research in areas within their interest so that such projects are within the lecturer's research focus.

While the last strategy has a multiple effect on the lecturer's research output, it raises interesting debates from students and some academics. First, it assumes that the supervisor is able to write a quality publishable research report and is able to focus the student on a research problem with a high utility value. The second assumption raises questions on the lecturer's competency for the actual data collection in the field, ethics of research project supervision and ownership of research project findings. Osborne and Holland (2009) compared publication of such research to use of cheap research field labour by lecturers rather than part of an academic intellectual mentorship process. One can argue that there are many ways of developing students' practical research skills; one of which is working on students' project with a student under one's supervision. It is a form of research mentorship or apprenticeship.

To guide us in this study, we need a synchronised working definition of a student's research project, its purpose and the role of the research project supervisor in the process. Race (2007, p. 205) considers a research project to be "a piece of research or other extended study, carried in the final level of study involving the acquisition and critical assessment of new information and usually resulting in a printed report."

The definition shows that the research project is the student's learning task. To that end, a mark for the project report is awarded to the student, not the supervisor, on the assumption that the research project is authored by the student. In many universities, for example at Chinhoyi University of Technology, it is prerequisite for students to sign a declaration statement to the fact that the project is their original work. However, the declaration statement is silent on the contribution by the research project supervisor so as to credit for authorship by the supervisor for the published paper.

Indeed, the research project is a very important component of any

degree program. Race (2007) identifies seven good reasons for including research projects in degree programs. They include:

i)   Providing students with an opportunity to study something in depth. This is a learning function in which the project is a teaching/learning tool.

ii) Helping to identify students who are really worth of a good degree. Here the project is an evaluation tool with a high discrimination index.

iii) Introducing students to the application of research methods in the real world.

iv) Helping students develop an awareness of the fact that there are limits to "confident knowledge"; a cognitive inquiring tool.

v)   Giving students the opportunity to develop a wide range of personal transferable skills.

vi) Providing an opportunity to combine teaching and research. This is a mentoring function.

vii) Allowing students to accumulate visible evidence of their research achievements; an evaluative function.

The reasons above are student centred skills, implying that the research project is for the student rather than the lecturer or supervisor. Hence the supervisor cannot be co-author on the basis of assisting the student to do his/her work.

Mhlanga and Ncube (2003) identify the following roles of a research project supervisor in a research project supervision process: The supervisor:

i)   helps to clarify the student's thinking

ii) provides academic guidance and back up

iii) acts as the student's consultant and evaluator of the research process

iv) helps the student researcher to various sources

v)   helps students with data treatment techniques

vi) is the student researcher motivator

They concluded by emphasising that the supervisor neither assigns research topics nor dictates trends. Points 2 and 4, suggest that the

supervisor is a mentor rather than a co-author. The ownership of the research product, good or bad, ultimately lies with the student and not the supervisor. Further to this, the functions of the supervisor do not infer that he/she is a co-researcher or co-author of a student's research project.

In addition Cryer (2006, p. 47) emphasises that a principal supervisor's primary professional responsibility is to develop his or her research students so that they can think and behave independently as academic and scholarly researchers in the field of study. Independence can be acquired by allowing students the freedom to be autonomous authors.

According to Lee (2009) students want a supervisor:
   i)   with the same or similar research interests as theirs
   ii) who is already involved in interesting research in the area
   iii) with an established reputation for student supervision
   iv) with knowledge and experience of the research methods to be used
   v)   who actually wants and enjoys the research supervision work
   vi) who ensures that the student achieves the best and most rigorous research possible

What is clear here is that research project supervisees are looking for professional guidance from supervisors not co-authors. They want the project supervisor to answer the question: "How can I research?".
The arguments so far draw the debate to the issue of research project ownership. Hall and Longman (2008) regard research project ownership as the acceptance of all parties to a research project. Its key philosophical assumptions are that:
   i)   Things that are owned, including research project findings, are valued more highly and cared for better.
   ii) Where the authorship of a project is owned by all parties, they are more likely to be diligent and self–regulating.
   iii) Best practice is achieved by professionals' own self–regulation.

The phrase 'self-regulation' in the last two points opens room for the supervisor and student to negotiate and reach a consensus on authorship

of published work from the student's project.

Unfortunately, in terms of social influence and expert power, the supervisor and the student are not on an equal footing for authorship negotiation. Under such circumstances Kwok (2005) feared that misuse of power by the supervisor and ignorance of the student about his/her rights of authorship can be a basis for irresponsible authorship. For example, unscrupulous research supervisors can use their experience to distort authorship of publications and conference papers by including themselves as co-authors while they are not supposed to do so. Alternatively, they dilute the student's authorship credit by adding other collaborators. Apart from this, Lawrence (2002), and Sandler and Russell (2005) added that students are at risk of exploitation by not being acknowledged or assigned authorship for work derived from their research project.

Griffiths (2010, p.76) acknowledges that students are at liberty to publish their work as papers with:
  i) themselves as a single author
  ii) themselves as first author and their supervisor as second author
  iii) themselves as second author and their supervisor as the principal author

Although these conditions assign the decision of authorship credit to the student, Griffiths (2010, p. 76) also endorses that a student can have his/her paper published by their supervisor and / or research team with no authorship at all for the student. This view, however, creates problems.

Research problem trends
Lecturers are publishing work from students' projects without assigning the appropriate authorship credit to the student. The problem only surfaces when the student complains to the Editor-in-Chief of the journal which would have published the paper. For example, Polman (2010) dragged a Professor of Psychology to a Health Professions Council (HPC) accusing the Professor of reproducing large sections of a supervisee's dissertation and assigning the student a third author position without the students' consent.

In the United Kingdom, Baty (2004) reported that a senior lecturer at Cardiff University was suspended after an investigation panel found that he had plagiarized a former student's PhD thesis for articles published in two international journals. The lecturer's defence reads, "I would like to see clear guidelines that regulate the relationship between research supervisors and their supervisees to prevent similar incidents in the future" (Baty, 2004). This defence necessitates the current study which sought to establish a research policy to guide publication of students' work.

In Zimbabwe, the Editorial Board (2002) of the *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research* (*ZJER*) proclaimed that a professor misrepresented himself as principal and co-author of an article entitled, "Research on school effectiveness on pupils' achievement in developing countries with special reference to Malawi: Some methodical issues" in the *ZJER*, *Volume 9*, Number 1, pages 65-91, 1997. The editorial board requested its readers to delete the professor's name from the article and give credit to its appropriate owner who happened to have been the professor's supervisee. Such a scenario impacts negatively on the journal and its editorship. Furthermore, it dents the professional credibility of the professor in particular and publications by university lecturers in general.

Besides the significance of this problem in the academic field, Costa and Gatz (1992) and The British Psychological Society (2004), concur that literature in this area concentrates on authorship between colleagues and peers and reference to undergraduate or postgraduate work is usually given cursory coverage. New universities, like Chinhoyi University of Technology, have no policy guiding lecturers publishing work based on students' projects and dissertations. This policy gap calls for the current study exploring literature and the views of lecturers and students as a basis for formulating a policy on the publishing of supervised research projects findings.

Research question

This study sought answers to the question:
What policy can guide the publication of supervised students' research projects findings?

Hypothesis

The study hypothesized that:
H_0: Participants' views are not associated with participant's group.
H_1: Participants' views are associated with participant's group.

Significance of study

This study is an important basis for university policy on the ownership and publication of students' research projects. Inclusion of students' views in such a policy is also important for the smooth implementation of modalities. The study contributes to the limited literature on student project supervision, research ownership and lecturers publishing students' research projects.

Authorship determination

According to the American Psychological Association (APA) (2002), authorship entails a public acknowledgement of scientific or professional contribution to a disseminated piece of information. National Health and Medical Research Council (1997) emphasised the involvement of the author in various tasks associated with the project.
These statutory instruments concur that a student is usually the principal author on any multiple-authored article that is based primarily on the student's dissertation or thesis. The word "primarily" is relative in research work. Exceptional cases include cases where the student was funded, in which case the data belongs to donors of the research.

Clarifications from the American Psychological Association (2002) and Kwok (2005) raise three strong points:
    i)   Authorship credit should be given according to the individual's contribution to the study. One is considered an author if he/she contributed to the initial research design, data collection and analysis, a manuscript drafting and final reporting. A lecturer

can claim participation in all these stages of the student's research paper hence may deserve authorship credit to the student's publishable paper.

ii) The principal author assumes responsibility for the publication and making sure that: the data is accurate; all deserving authors are credited; all authors have given their approval to the final draft; and handles responses to inquiries after the manuscript is published.

iii) The following do not qualify for credit of authorship: those providing funding or resources, mentorship or contributing to the research but not helping with the publication itself.

According to Osborne and Holland (2009:4) a deserving author should have "substantial contribution." This includes contribution during:

a) conception or design of the project
b) data collection and processing
c) analysis and interpretation of data
d) writing substantial sections of the paper

To this list of author determinants, Kwok (2005) requires authors to have:

e) drafted the article or revised it critically for important intellectual content
f) final approval of the version to be published

A more important and critical determinant is that any author must be able to defend, without help from co-authors, the work, results and everything else included in the published manuscript. These determinants can be used to determine whether a supervisor is a co-author or not.

Charles Sturt University (2012) Higher Degrees Research Act stipulates that higher degrees research candidates have a moral and ethical obligation to publish from their research. The public invests significantly in the university sector through taxation hence deserve explicit returns. To this end, supervisors are paid and expected to mentor candidates for publication using their dissertations. This

statement renders it criminal if the supervisor publishes his or her student's research without the approval of or assigning credit of authorship to the student.

Charles Sturt University Act (2012) charges that the following contributions do not justify authorship:
a)   being head of department, holding positions of authority or personal friendship
b)   providing technical contribution but no other intellectual input to the project or publication
c)   providing routine assistance for the project for example supervision of the research team
d)   providing data that has already been published

Charles Sturt University Act (2012) declares that higher degrees research candidates should be the principal authors of publications from their theses. The supervisor is accorded second author status if he/she designated the primary variables, made data interpretive contributions but does not deserve second author status for providing encouragement, critiques or editorial contributions. The supervisor can only be the principal author with the written approval of the higher degrees research candidate.

Literature reviewed tells how other universities like Charles Sturt University handles publication of students' work. Little is said about universities in Zimbabwe, particularly how lecturers and students would like the students research work to be published. This calls for the current study which sought views of lecturers and students on lecturers publishing research projects by students as a means of levelling the ground.

Methodology
Research design
This study applied a quantitative descriptive survey research design in two parts, namely the non-empirical (literature) and empirical investigations in the field. This was influenced by Punch's (2006:17) model of research design which is guided by a research question and a

hypothesis. The design allows the researcher to include literature as data and bench-marks for the empirical stage. Descriptive survey enables the researcher to identify the views of lecturers and students, their distribution and possible factors contributing to the distribution.

Population and sampling
The population of this study is drawn from lecturers, undergraduate and postgraduate students of Chinhoyi University of Technology. Discrepancies of views towards lecturers publishing students' research projects are anticipated to depend on the group in which the respondent belongs hence calling for cluster sampling.

Since the total number of students and lecturers is known, probability sampling is appropriate. The population is in three clusters and this justifies cluster sampling. The researcher applied proportional sampling from cluster to cluster to cater for the quantitative variation. This was followed by simple random sampling within each group since participants' views towards lecturers' publishing students' research is assumed to be uniformly distributed within the group. This was done to raise a sample size of 204 composed of 26 lecturers, 130 undergraduate and 48 post graduate students. The sample size is large enough for the variable to be normally distributed and findings generalised to similar cases.

Instruments
A self-reporting questionnaire was the main instrument used in this study. This was considered appropriate for individual views to be collected from a large literate population. Participants are literate enough to describe their views in writing. Data were collected from many people within three days. A focus group discussion was also used to collect group views. Students and staff portal was also used to extract comments on whether lecturers should publish students' research work.

Data collection and analysis
The researcher structured the instruments for this study. They were pilot-tested at Midlands State University on a sample of 62 participants. The researcher who teaches both undergraduate and postgraduate students administered the questionnaire and collected it the same day

from each group. Focus group discussions were held during free time of each target group.

The researcher also gathered comments from students and lecturers in response to the following questions posted on the portal of staff and students:
   a) Should lecturers publish from students' research?
   b) What does the university policy say?

Completed questionnaires were screened for data completeness and answering of key research questions. Narrative views where transcribed and recorded in tables where frequencies were generated to show variable distribution and percentages used for comparison. A chi-square test for association was carried out at 5% level of significance to test the null hypothesis raised in this study.

Chi-square test for association is justified by Kothari (2004:282) who affirms that observations be collected on a random basis, all items in the sample be independent, all groups have at least 10 items and the overall sample size should be at least 50. Findings are presented as grouped data to comply with ethical requirements for anonymity.

Findings and discussions
Table 1

Distribution by views of participants to lecturers publishing students' research projects

	Participants Group			
Views	Lecturers	Undergraduates	Postgraduates	Total
Yes	15 (17.0)	88 (84.8)	30 (31.2)	133 (65%)
No	11 (9.0)	42 (45.2)	18 (16.8)	71 (35%)
Total	26	130	48	204

The table shows that the majority (65%) of participants would like lecturers to publish papers using students' dissertations.

Since s X^2calc $= 0.78 < X^2crit = 5,991$ at 5%, level of significance, the null hypothesis was accepted and the study concluded that there is no significant difference on participants' views. The hypothesis test implied that findings can be presented in two basic variable groups according to views for or against lecturers publishing students' research projects.

Participants who objected to lecturers publishing students' research work posted the following comments:

a) *Research project supervisors have a misconception that they have the moral as well as the legal right to the content of the thesis supervised by them in any way they like. Their role is to supervise and not write the thesis for the student. The project belongs to the student not supervisor hence supervisor cannot be co-author.*

b) *By including themselves as co-authors, supervisors are claiming fieldwork activities which they would not have done. That's academic falsification or lecturer professional misconduct.*

c) *That's student exploitation hence unethical.*

d) *When lecturers over-assist students by providing specific topic, a pool of current literature and helps with both, the statistics and discussion of findings, then the student is not being supervised. The mark awarded to the student is not reliable. It does not reflect the student's achievement.*

e) *Supervisors should supervise and not co-author the project with the student. After the results are published, they can develop students' (supervisee's) skills to write for publication.*

Those who supported supervisor, student research paper co-authorship had the following comments:

a) *The student must be the principal author for all work derived from his/her research. This was also strongly supported by Kwok (2005), Osborne and Holland (2009).*

b) *Including the supervisor as a co-author increases his/her*

involvement which improves the quality of the paper and increases the chances of the paper being accepted and published.

c) *It must be mandatory that all research supervised by public servants (professors included) or funded by taxpayers' money belong to the public and should be published.*

d) *There must be two separate phases of supervisor, student interactions in a research project. First supervisor/supervisee activities separated by dissertation examinations and results then lecturer/student co-authorship of publishable paper.*

e) *Universities can actually run a program in which willing completing students undergo a course in writing for publication then publish from their dissertations. They (students) can decide to publish by themselves or together with their supervisors as co-authors.*

Policy recommendations

On the basis of these findings, this study makes the following policy recommendations:

1. Universities could consider the publication of students' research projects as part of its research policy agenda. This can be achieved by:

a) Establishing a student research unit (SRU) responsible for the registration and publication of students' research. One or two research lecturers could work in this unit.

b) Supervisors could identify good research projects and recommend these to the SRU.

c) Students whose projects are recommended for publication should be offered mentoring to enable them to write a publishable research articles from their projects.

d) A shelf could be allocated for journals containing students' published research from local and other foreign universities or internet publications.

e) The SRU could market study findings to different implementing organisations. Student researchers could also present findings to different target organisations on special research expos.

2. The student must be credited as the principal author of published

research derived from his/her research project work. The student can choose to publish as sole author or principal author with supervisor as second co-author if the supervisor contributed significantly, after dissertation results and training, to the quality of the published paper.

3. Doctoral students could publish on their own and provide a copy of the publication to the university students' research unit.

4. Journals could also have a policy on the publication of work from students' research projects, included on notes to contributors.

Conclusion

This study was motivated by the fact that lecturers are publishing students' research as theirs or as co-authors without the students' approval. Such misrepresentation of authorship in research results in authorship right litigations, supervisor accusations and withdrawal of publication rights of research. Unfortunately, many universities have no clear policies currently on the publication of students' research work. This study concluded that students and lecturers should publish research findings from studies carried out by students under their supervisors' guidance. Since students receive professional guidance from supervisors, they are the principal authors who should be mentored to write for publication. They can decide to publish on their own or together with their supervisors as co-authors. Universities are encouraged to implement the suggested policy on the publication of research findings from their students. If the suggested policy recommendations are implemented, they would be beneficial to students who are always the principal authors, the lecturers who supervised the project, the university and all stakeholders in education and academic research.

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