PUBLISH AND BE DAMNED: INSTITUTIONAL PRESSURE TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AND BE PUBLISHED IN THAILAND

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Introduction

Thailand's National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA) in a recent open letter bemoaned the Thai government's stance on scientific research. They state that Thailand's scientific research is going downhill and that the government is only concerned with ways to solve problems in the short term and focuses too much on related business opportunities (Online Reporters, 2013). The result is that Thailand's skills and competitiveness have suffered.

It was Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, who was attributed with the phrase, 'Publish and be damned' when confronted with the threat of his letters being published in the memoirs of Harriette Wilson. The plight of budding teachers, lecturers and academics has never been so intense as it is now, due to the pressure being exerted by educational institutions around the world to have academic research papers published in quality journals in order to increase the establishment's standing in the country and world rankings. English is the lingua franca for scholastic publication (Curry & Lillis, 2004), so it is quite possible that in today's academic climate, you and your career will be damned if you don't publish in a premiere English language journal.

The recent crackdown on bogus schools (Intathep, 2013a) and the pro-active dissemination of Beall's List of Predatory Publishers (Beall, 2012) around Thailand's academic community has helped in some way to eradicate some of the quick fix solutions to the problem of publishing high impact international journal articles as part of the PhD requirements for the majority of Thailand's universities. More effort is needed to educate potential authors, rather than circumvent the existing rules and regulations that are in place to give order and structure to academic discourse.

Investigating the differences between Thai and international research articles in ELT, Jaroongkhongdach, Watson Todd, Keyuravong and Hall (2012) stated how research papers are being used around the world to sway tertiary educational operations and strategy. This is no different for other disciplines as universities try to

clamber to the top of the ratings tables by having articles published in high impact factor journals.

When making these comparisons, there is deemed to be a certain amount of inequality across the disciplines when it comes to the use of these impact factors due to the different explicit penchant in the making of references, the quickness of change in a discipline and the differing amount of journals for the various subject categories (Sombatsompop, Markpin, Yochai & Saechiew, 2005) with the impact factor coming from a relatively small amount of cited articles.

The Thailand case study referred to in the previous paragraph illustrated how clinical medicine was the top discipline as far as cited articles were concerned, with chemistry being the area that had the most improvement over the research period 1998-2002. Although clinical medicine was ranked first by a long way, it showed the least improvement over the period compared to the other disciplines in the study.

This article looks at the contributing factors associated with the pressures endured by university lecturers in their quest to conduct research and publish quality articles in high impact factor journals.

Job specifications and unrealistic demands

Academic identity has been well addressed by Clegg (2008). As governments around the world are driven by global challenges and the requirement to produce employable graduates, academic identities in the field of education cannot be simply categorised as teacher, researcher or manager. She suggests that a more hybrid set of characteristics are developing based on 'professional and practice based loyalties'.

Baber (2012), who as the President of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL), recently described the duties required of teachers who are part of his IATEFL membership. Teaching, teacher training and lecturing are the first three components covered, followed by research, leadership and management, writing and publishing. These areas of expertise are honed over a period of many years during the lifetime of

a fully committed teacher; however, in order to progress along a chosen career path, less experienced teachers of English find themselves being asked to perform more and more in areas that they feel they are not trained or qualified to carry out. Most join the English teaching profession to teach and have no inclination that there are many other duties and responsibilities that are expected of them. Coupled with ever increasing teaching workloads, grading and the need to keep up to date with the advances in methodology and pedagogy, the possibility of burnout and teachers leaving the profession has increased. There is a clear mismatch between the expectations of the teacher and that of the educational institution. The days of just turning up for class with a dutifully crafted lesson plan have been over for many years across the teaching spectrum.

Khon Kaen University in north-eastern Thailand is one of the nine universities selected as outstanding research universities and upgraded to become a world-class university (Sombatsompop, Markpin, Ratchatahirun, Yochai, Wongkaew & Premkamolnetr, 2010). By looking at a set of tertiary level evaluation criteria as part of the employee performance review from Khon Kaen University International College, we can see an example of the amount of work that university lecturers are required to complete in order to win a new contract or battle for career advancement.

The minimum workload is 35 hours a week and is categorised into three areas. First, there is teaching which comprises of actual teaching hours, supervision of projects, teaching support and all other teaching related work. Next, there is knowledge development which includes research proposals, ongoing projects, successful collaborations, publications, book chapters, text books, proceedings, conference presentations, technical reports and research articles. Finally, there is service, which contains hours as an advisor, committee member, any involvement in curricular activities and service to the faculty, university and to the community.

The proportions should be divided up as follows; 60% teaching workload (21 hours a week), 20%-30% knowledge development workload (7-10.5 hours a week) and 10%-20% service workload (3.5-7 hours a week). In order to give a working example, using the calculations given by the university for this current year, the author has completed 45 hours a week teaching workload, 25 hours a week knowledge development workload and 4 hours a week service workload. The total workload hours totals 74

hours, which is more than double the minimum requirement. Not only are the hours excessive, they also do not guarantee a new yearly contract or academic advancement.

Khon Kaen University has identified a set of 5 core skills that lecturers are to demonstrate as faculty members. First, members must be results orientated (goal driven) and should focus on the desired results, setting challenges, focussing their efforts in attaining and exceeding them. Then, they must also use creative thinking to enhance and express their original ideas and imagination. Next, faculty members are to be leaders and are to accept responsibility, develop trust, enhance credibility and strive for excellence whilst demonstrating high levels of political judgement. After that, they must be professionally competent, demonstrating integrity and professional behaviour at all times. Finally, faculty members are to encourage collaboration and cooperation in order to build effective teams and partnerships with others. Members are graded by self-review, student assessments and by a committee.

The author's example of workload standards and criteria demonstrates the pressure that is applied to lecturers in the tertiary educational system to teach, research and provide a service to the university and local population. With double the required hours being worked, there is an extraordinary amount of pressure to produce research and when grants are given for research purposes, the final research paper must be of a high enough standard to be published in a top grade journal with an impact factor, thus improving the ratings of the universities concerned.

To summarise, although the criteria for job specifications sets a minimum standard, there is not a maximum limit. A larger teaching load impacts on all the other responsibilities resulting in more strain and anxiety for researchers who need to produce high quality research and to be published. The five core skills required by the university make it very difficult to refuse the additional duties, so as a consequence, this adds an additional burden.

Three wise educators
During the last year, the author has attended three seminars from three different scholars from three different organisations promoting the better writing of thesis and academic papers. The first was by David Beckett from the University of Melbourne, Australia, the second was by Vish Maheshwari from Leeds Business School, Leeds Metropolitan University, UK and the last was by

Valerie Teng-Broug from Elsevier BV, Amsterdam in the Netherlands.

What was surprising and to be truthful, quite encouraging was the mechanical and methodical way that all three presenters put forward their arguments for better publications. The article to be published must be new, clear, useful and exciting. It must be presented in a logical manner and be easy to understand. One of the most important points stated was that it must advance our understanding of the subject. To this end the objectives needed have to be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed).

Each presenter put forward their ideas as to the logical sequence of events and they were not too dissimilar. The main areas stressed were the research question, the summary of the literature review section showing the focus of attention, and the discussion section that shows the transformation of data to new knowledge. Finally, the conclusion showing how the research question was answered. Not all presentations were exactly the same; however, they followed a very similar pattern.

To sum up, there needs to be a clear research question, a niche carved out of the literature review section, transformation of data into new knowledge (or take existing knowledge to a new level) in the discussion section and the research question answered in the conclusion. Having satisfied this criterion, the aims and the scope of the desired journal have to be adhered to in order for the research paper to be published.

Analysis of problem areas
Native speakers of English have numerous problems when trying to publish in a top grade journal. Multi-lingual scholars are faced with many additional difficulties and challenges in their quest for international publication. Uzuner (2008) reveals that as well as language problems and the tendency to be too localised in their research, multilingual scholars tend to move away from the accepted norms of research writing in that they present arguments without sufficient evidence. This is not a linguistic problem, but one of cultural style.

In addition, the literature review and the discussion sections were highlighted by Jaroongkhongdach, Watson Todd, Keyuravong and Hall (2012) as areas of concern for ELT professionals in Thailand, as well as the features of coherence, justification and awareness. This is of particular interest as you would have expected ELT professionals to have a more than adequate understanding of what was expected from potential authors of academic research.

In a study based in Thailand by Sombatsompop, Kositchaiyong, Markpin and Inrit (2006) into the quality of international research articles, research papers from non Thai academics tended to cite Thai articles in the introduction section of the paper, especially for material sciences and engineering disciplines. The results and discussion sections were used predominantly for clinical medicine. Furthermore, the discussions from Thai articles were used by non-Thai researchers to discuss their own research. General references tended to draw the most citations from the chemistry, material sciences and engineering disciplines; however, there is concern that there was only 1.5% of Thai research considered 'pioneering' to the research community.

Uzuner (2008) continued that there was evidence of bias towards multilingual scholars as well as confirmation that there had been more funding available for those scholars from predominantly English speaking countries. Moreover, writing in English can be boring for multilingual scholars, especially if there is no connection with others from the academic community. Collaboration would benefit all concerned; however, a recent study by the National Center for Literacy Education (2013) found a worrying trend that shows that teacher collaboration in the USA was virtually non-existent due to financial restraints and that schools were not structured in a way conducive to collaboration.

Thai culture also has an important part to play. Komin (1990) described Thai people as being very ego orientated when conducting research into work related values in Thai organisations, having 'a deep sense of independence, pride and dignity'. The value of saving face is particularly important for Thai people (Persons, 2008) as is the social rule of 'keng jai' which dictates daily interpersonal conduct, loosely defined as being considerate to others (Komin, 1990) or more comprehensively described by Klausner (2000) as 'diffidence, deference and consideration merged with respect'. Criticism is taken personally by Thai people (Komin, 1990) and is usually met with 'choei' which can best be described as a cool temperament (Embree, 1950), so the idea of writing quality journal articles which are to be peer reviewed and held up to public scrutiny defies some of the core values of Thai culture. Of course, this is a generalisation; however, this author believes that it is something that should not be ignored. After all, Hofstede (1980) based his

whole work on the generalisations of the world's cultures.

Discussion

The research results of (Sombatsompop, Markpin, Ratchatahirun, Yochai, Wongkaew & Premkamolnetr, 2010) show that the leading nine universities in Thailand have performed well as far as research productivity and impact are concerned during the period 2007-2009; however, nearly 40% of published articles were not cited during the same period. This is an area that needs to be addressed by academics if universities wish to climb the world rankings. The resulting research would give more credibility to existing Thai research and increase the statistics that the universities are seeking.

With regard to Thai culture, while foreigners believe that Thailand has a loosely structured society (Embree, 1950), this is, in fact, not the case. Mulder (1979) informs us that the social rules and procedures of Thai people take priority over the 'rules of the land' and that they are very conscious of the fact; which could go some way to explaining why Thai multilingual scholars have tended to deviate from the accepted international standards of research writing expected for high impact journals (Uzuner, 2008). The mechanical process of academic writing and the rigour of high-grade research ensure that departure from the norm is doomed to failure, especially when international systems and controls are in place that do not buckle to local preferences.

Although there is a possibility that there will be some kind of 'superficial engagement' in the use of English for scholastic purposes (Phan, 2013), it is unlikely that English will replace local languages. Neither will there be any damage to the concept of Thainess. Thongchai Winichaku, a well-known Thai historian recently stated that the perceived threat to Thailand's morality by the West has to be countered by the example set as a model for progress (Kaewmala, 2013). Interestingly from an outsider's perspective, he believes that Thai-centrism is at the core of ignorance and narcissism.

Action research in the classroom would be a good way to foster more collaboration and to satisfy the need to publish one's findings (Borg, 2006); however, this type of research is not recognised by Thailand's authorities as a form of research for an academic position and so tends to be neglected by many teachers and lecturers. This is unfortunate because action research is seen as a good way to maintain real time involvement and cooperation. The inter-relationships between the individual, the expertise and the political facets of action research, in conjunction with personified teachers' knowledge would lead to more collaboration and community shared knowledge (Colucci-Gray, Das, Gray, Robson & Spratt, 2013).

The research by Clegg (2008) has shown that in the face of pressure to perform as an academic, scholars have created their own niches and found their respective autonomy and agency. High quality research has a logic of enquiry that draws sound conclusions from reliable research. It is important to pay particular attention to where and how research is published so that researchers and universities can maximise the benefits from the efforts expended (Duke & Martin, 2011). Having selected the journal of choice, authors need to adhere to the aims and scope of that journal and pay particular attention to the advice that the editors may give. A good example is the Language Teaching Research (LTR) journal that gave specific instructions for authors when there was a recent change in editorship (Barkhuizen, 2012).

Conclusion

It is hoped that with a better understanding as to what is expected from internationally peer reviewed articles published in leading journals, there will be more quality papers published and less need for plagiarism and ghost writing (Pichitimarn, 2013). The closing down of fake universities (Intathep, 2013b) in Thailand and a conscious effort to circumvent predatory publishers goes some way to preparing the correct passage; however, this in itself is not enough.

The idea of the internationalisation and globalisation of education is to bring more equality and access to information; however, unlike Phan (2013), this author believes that this is impossible whilst the present system of 'pay per view' exists. With more open source material available, there should be more opportunities for non English speaking and less advantaged non English speaking nations to access knowledge; thus decreasing the Matthews Effect (Walberg & Tsai, 1983) of the 'haves' and the 'have nots'.

More research is required to fully understand the problems experienced by academics in Thailand when conducting and publishing research. The study by Jaroongkhongdach, Watson Todd, Keyuravong & Hall (2012) is a comprehensive example of what can be accomplished when looking at one discipline, in this case ELT professionals. To gain more knowledge of the difficulties experienced by Thai scholars from other disciplines (for example the

disciplines covered by Sombatsompop, Kositchaiyong, Markpin & Inrit, (2006)), it would be beneficial to complete individual studies on each discipline and then conduct a compartive study to understand the full picture. Only then will we possibly have a complete understanding as to the institutional pressures to conduct research and be published in Thailand.

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