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Contentment or Torment? An Analytic Autoethnography of Publication Aptitude in Doctor of Philosophy

Atiqur sm-Rahman

Linköping University, Sweden, atiqur.rahman@liu.se

Yasmin Jahan

Hiroshima University, Japan

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Abstract

The burgeoning trend of pursuing publication in a leading journal, as a benchmark of standard doctoral research, has become an appealing expectation of early-stage doctoral researchers (ESDR). However, recent pedagogical studies showed limited attention to exploring the dynamic relations between doctoral education and the academic publication process. Our aim was to investigate and understand (if and) how this intricately intertwined relation contributes to the scholarly publication practice in doctoral education from an individual and institutional context. We used a duo-analytic autoethnography approach and presented a comprehensive narrative based on the authors' self-reflections by using a range of data sources namely research diaries, journaling, seminars, training courses, online forum talking, and web-based open sources. Through our autoethnographic narrative, we found five key aspects associated with publication practices in doctoral programs: quality-quantity debate, authorship dilemma, journal selection process, publishing in leading journals, and publication process. We additionally mapped out a conclusive publication cycle to demonstrate how dominant structural factors of the doctoral program subsequently affect the publication process, influence ESDR's decision-making, and potentially reinforce academic pressures. Based on our study findings, we concluded that doctoral education should remain research intensive rather than a simplified way of obtaining a higher academic qualification.

Keywords

Doctoral Education, Scholarly Publication, Early Career Researcher, Autoethnography, Journal Impact Factor

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Contentment or Torment? An Analytic Autoethnography of Publication Aptitude in Doctor of Philosophy

Atiqur sm-Rahman
Linköping University, Sweden

Yasmin Jahan
Hiroshima University, Japan

The burgeoning trend of pursuing publication in a leading journal, as a benchmark of standard doctoral research, has become an appealing expectation of early-stage doctoral researchers (ESDR). However, recent pedagogical studies showed limited attention to exploring the dynamic relations between doctoral education and the academic publication process. Our aim was to investigate and understand (if and) how this intricately intertwined relation contributes to the scholarly publication practice in doctoral education from an individual and institutional context. We used a duo-analytic autoethnography approach and presented a comprehensive narrative based on the authors' self-reflections by using a range of data sources namely research diaries, journaling, seminars, training courses, online forum talking, and web-based open sources. Through our autoethnographic narrative, we found five key aspects associated with publication practices in doctoral programs: quality-quantity debate, authorship dilemma, journal selection process, publishing in leading journals, and publication process. We additionally mapped out a conclusive publication cycle to demonstrate how dominant structural factors of the doctoral program subsequently affect the publication process, influence ESDR's decision-making, and potentially reinforce academic pressures. Based on our study findings, we concluded that doctoral education should remain research intensive rather than a simplified way of obtaining a higher academic qualification. Keywords: Doctoral Education, Scholarly Publication, Early Career Researcher, Autoethnography, Journal Impact Factor

Introduction

Scholarly publication is one of the exponential modes of developing existing knowledge and progress of any profession (Dipboye, 2006). It serves as a source of knowledge and provides an opportunity for students and emerging researchers to be helpful in the advancement of social experiences (Henly & Dougherty, 2009). A recent review showed that the published research outcome in academic journals has become one of the purposes and a metric as well of the contemporary Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) program in several countries such as the UK, New Zealand, Australia, and the USA (Jackson, 2013). Pursuing a PhD journey is significantly different with respect to inquisitiveness, creativity, discipline, persistence, perseverance, and meticulousness. However, the degree is supposed to be a little more than merely toting two letters (Dr) or three letters (PhD) as prefix or suffix with an individual's academic credential.

Successful completion of the PhD, as the highest academic research degree, is more likely “*diligence*” than “*intelligence*” which has now become associated with income

generation perspectives, competitive funding grants as well as internal promotion (Bolden et al., 2014; Mason & Merga, 2018; Scott et al., 2010; Walsh & Lee, 2015). What makes it even more difficult is not to consider research output as “*research excellence*” but more a tool of measuring “*individual success*” (Bromham et al., 2016). It is just that we have gotten used to it, so used to it. A steady increase in this pressure has also fueled and been quadrupled by the academic tribes. The circumstance encourages the early-stage doctoral researchers (ESDR) to choose “quantity over quality” (Norton & Cherastidham, 2016). The stimulating ideology behind the thought is “the more you publish, the more you will be successful” which is true to some extent. From an institutional context, mostly all academic disciplines such as natural science, arts and humanities, social sciences, and business schools have endured the implications with no exception. Hence, the ESDR has been victimized by encountering several challenges in publishing their research output from a personal level. These challenges include where to publish, journal audience, mixed responses of journal reviewers, and politics of publication (Appel & Dahlgren, 2003; Kamler, 2008; Kena et al., 2015; Lawrence, 2003; Leonard et al., 2005; Wright, 2003).

Publishing in a topnotch and leading journal is an appealing expectation of ESDRs. Besides, the recurrent global changes in the doctoral program, described as “*New Route PhD*” by Park (2005, p. 190), are contributing to promoting the publication trend. These two influential factors shape ESDRs’ capitalistic understanding of intellectual expressions. We assume that the publishing process, probably a dilemma, equally affects ESDRs and researchers who have (or have not) secured a permanent academic position.

Paradigm Shift of Doctoral Education

The contemporary doctoral study programs developed from a deep-rooted historical process. Current research found that the doctor of philosophy (equivalent to DPhil, D.Lit, D.Sc, LL.D, Doctorate) does not refer to the academic discipline of Philosophy (Chang, 2011). Rather, the term, philosophy, genealogically directs to the Greek meaning “*love of wisdom.*” Historical evidence showed that the very first doctoral degree has been a part of higher education conferred by the University in medieval Paris in the middle of the 12th century (Noble, 1994). Precisely, the global expansion of the modern PhD degree took place in the early 19th century in Berlin University, Germany (Park, 2005), in Europe; at Yale University, USA, in 1861 (Rosenberg, 1961); and at the University of Oxford, England, in 1917 (Bourner et al., 2001; Simpson, 1983). Even though the first Australian PhD was granted by the University of Melbourne in 1948 (Dobson, 2012; Evans et al., 2003), the newly formatted PhD degree was introduced in 1996 (Jackson, 2013). In recent times, the doctoral program includes “traditional PhD,” “professional PhD,” “full-time PhD,” “part-time PhD,” “industrial PhD,” “performance-based PhD,” “hybrid PhD,” “sandwich PhD,” and “integrated PhD” (Jones, 2013). The most commonly practiced feature of a doctoral degree finishes, in principle, with several scientific publications in peer-reviewed journals, besides conventional monograph writing. Therefore, PhD by publication tends to be a gateway of building a weighty academic profile together with unique challenges such as co-authorship with supervisors, time management, and coping with rejection amongst many.

Historical Pathway of Scholarly Publication

The year 2015 was the 350th anniversary of scientific journals (*American Journal Experts* [AJE], 2018) which is rooted in a systematic historic growth. Historically, the mid-17th century was the birth period of scientific research dissemination. It started with a public gathering of a small group of folks in a place to share their work in person. This group-meeting

turned into scholarly/academic societies. In a definition, Vekkaila and colleagues (2012) described the scholarly community as “a complex, nested entity that includes several distinct, complementary and partially overlapping communities or groups (p. 155).” Historical testimonials showed that the *Compagnie du Gai Sçavoir*, France (the oldest learned society on record), and the Royal Society of London, UK, were the first two scholarly communities established in 1323 and in 1660, respectively. The primary purpose was to preserve scientific evidence and scientific priority as well as to ensure peer-review. However, the peer-review system was not exactly like today's version. One of the principal goals of the scholarly communities was to produce advanced scientific knowledge by avoiding duplication of research outcomes. The first ever journal article was published jointly by *Journal des Sçavans* (France) and the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* (England) in 1665. The Royal Society of Edinburgh had published the first fully peer-reviewed journal article under the name of Medical Essays and Observations in 1731. In line with that trend, quite a few scholarly scientific societies emerged afterwards, namely the American Philosophical Society (1743), the American Association for the Advancement of Science (1848). Furthermore, the publication drift gave birth to a number of publishing houses such as Nature (1869), Science (1880), Elsevier (1947), SAGE (1965), Postmodern Culture (1990), arXiv (1991), the Public Library of Science (known as PLOS ONE) (2006) and many more (AJE, 2018).

The paradigm shifts and breakneck speeds of modern technology have transformed the mode of publication from print to electronic platform. This digitalized change has reduced both typesetting costs and time for publication houses as a bright side. Besides, the electronic platform allows scientists to maintain faster and convenient communication both within and across the research communities. Consequently, in 1990, the *Postmodern Culture* has appeared as the first online-only journal as a point of departure. From the early 1990s, the digital systems offer various open access options such as green, gold, and hybrid/paid to the authors (for details see, <https://research.library.gsu.edu/c.php?g=115588&p=754380>). This open access opportunity has benefitted those readers and researchers who are from a low-resource setting. Despite several opportunities, the online journals leave an implicit constraint on the authors to learn a multi-faced article submission ecosystem of journals which is illustrated in the following sections.

Our Study Purpose and Ourselves

The article highlights our journey as doctoral students by exploring the intricately intertwined structures in the PhD study programs and to understand associated challenges related to scholarly publication. We predominantly share our narratives to uncover the key aspects of publication practices in doctoral programs to contribute in the contemporary PhD-by-publication discussions (e.g., Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Kamler, 2008; Lee & Kamler, 2008; Powell, 2004; Wilson, 2002). The views and analyses introduced herein, as newcomers in doctoral programs, depict our self-reflections both as insiders and outsiders of the research in a homologous socio-cultural context. We used a duo-analytic autoethnographic approach (discussed in a later section) that allows us to combine our way of thinking expressed in the narratives.

We used “I” in our writing for transparency and to resist the temptation to produce authoritative interpretations. Although our autoethnography is presented as “our” story, we acknowledge all the ESDRs who have shared their experiences with us and gave their “voices” to enrich this writing. The entire writing process follows first person singular to avoid the connotation of “speaking for them.”

We, the authors of this paper, are pursuing doctoral study in two different countries and are in different stages of our research. Our doctoral research focuses on different disciplinary paradigms and English is the second language for both of us. We, an anthropologist (Atiqur Rahman), and a trained physician (Dr. Yasmin Jahan), are doing our research in a social science and health science discipline respectively. This academic diversity gives us both advantages and disadvantages. We benefit, for example, from each other's knowledge perceptions with a great deal of disagreement to some extent while writing, reading, rewriting, and rereading our autoethnographic narratives. However, the continuous online communication allowed us to turn our self-reflections into a meaningful narrative.

Methodology

Study Design

Our study is a duo-analytic autoethnographic essay and adheres to an integrated framework of analytic autoethnography engaged in by two authors as a methodological stance (Anderson, 2006; Norris & Sawyer, 2012). An analytic autoethnography is a data interpretation procedure in which the researcher's understanding emerges from the position as a member and as a researcher in the sociocultural phenomenon under study. It entails self-conscious introspection and sustains the reflexive position of the researcher(s) influenced by the researchers, their study settings, and informants. Furthermore, the autoethnographer-as-authors are often actively visible in the text.

The duo aspect of our autoethnography reconceptualizes the consciousness and culture that influence our experiences; and that experiences are often mediated by individual thought and cultural meaning (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). It is the experiences of two researchers' based on "(their) relationships, their analysis, and reconceptualization of personal histories and interpersonal relationships (Sawyer, 2012, p. 157)." In other words, the process and research outcome rely on some level of trust and familiarity between the two researchers. The research method is intended to disrupt the "metanarrative of self at the personal level by questioning held beliefs (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 15)."

Combining these aspects, our autoethnography focused on the exploration and understanding of the connectivity between "self" and "other" within the same context. That is, we connect (our) "self" with other social aspects as well as with surrounding contexts (Wolcott, 2004). Conducting research within own (ESDR) groups presented advantages and dilemmas. The most important issue in this regard is that we all are holding similar positions that enabled us to relate and made us ready to share our ideas and feelings. On the contrary, we went through a continual dilemma of dual membership from an insider/outsider perspective (Atkinson, 1999) which is sometimes debated as "bias." We tried to mitigate this dilemma by bridging our insider and outsider roles during the study. We put ourselves, for example, in the doctoral student category as an insider, and doing our research from the perspective of the different factors of the doctoral education system, and as an outsider. However, we recognize that the knowledge resulted from a social sciences research is not culture-free and needs culture-specific theorizing.

We choose this method for our study for three reasons: it is qualitative, self-focused, and context-conscious (Chang, 2013; Ellis et al., 2011). Apart from the criticism of "blurred distinction between the researcher-participant relationship" (Ngunjiri et al., 2010, p. 3), the method provided us a window to understanding the socio-cultural aspects of self both as a "subject" (the researcher who performs the investigation) and an "object" (a/the participant who is investigated).

Data Sources and Data Management

We utilized our own reflective processes to collect data from a variety of sources and produced multiple draft versions. The data sources were documents analysis, research diaries, journaling, seminars, training courses, conferences, daily conversations with fellow peers, formal and informal talking to senior researchers, day-to-day experiences, online forum talking, and web-based open sources. All the primary data was compiled in the Microsoft Word (Version 2017) documents labeled with an identifiable name such as “ESDR1_Seminar_Dec13_2018”, “ESDR1_Conf_March27_2018”. We used the Google Doc platform to get easy and remote access to our dataset where the accessibility was restricted to only the two of us. In the shared Google Doc, we used a specific font color for Atiqur (green) and for Yasmin (blue) to keep proper track of our writing. We collected experiences from a number of the ESDRs who we met in conferences, virtual forum discussions, and workshops during the study period. For example, we jointly presented a paper in the Joint International Tropical Medicine Meeting-2018 conference, from 12-14 December 2018 at Amari Watergate, Bangkok, Thailand. We met a couple of ESDRs and had a few small talks about our study topic during the conference tea or lunch breaks. However, the in-depth informal discussions mainly occurred in the evening (e.g., dinner invitation) besides the conference schedule. Fellow ESDRs from our respective fields showed interest in sharing experiences with us after knowing our study purpose. As part of our data collection, we took notes during conversation sessions including structured reflections, emotional experiences, personal process of conducting research, and institutional power structures and dynamics. How the evolving critical consciousness of our colleagues and peers influenced the understanding of their research focus served as reference points to determine the truthfulness of spontaneous recollections and reflected in the production of our narratives. It is worth noting that the number and details of participants or contributing ESDRs was not important in our study as we focused on the exploration of shared experiences to bring distinctive differences on the topic.

Data Analysis and Writing of our Narratives

The initial drafting process has gone through an iterative self-reflective process. In other words, the development of narratives was followed by backward, forwards, and sideways concurrent movement. The data analysis process from raw data to results followed a systematic process that is shown in Figure 1 illustrating that each process was performed several times to maintain the quality and trustworthiness of the analysis. The way we contemplated the data helped us to identify similarities and differences listed in data set. We considered a process of initial open and axial coding to develop categories or extract themes based on valid inference and interpretation of pertinence to linguistic units; words, phrases, or sentences (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). We continued the iterative process exhaustively until no additional themes surfaced.

We followed a number of steps to determine potential themes to present our study results. First, we familiarized ourselves individually with raw data to obtain the sense of whole considering “what is going on?” Second, we identified meanings of units, that is, the smallest unit (e.g., words, phrases, or sentences) that contains some of the insights we needed ensuring that all aspects of the content have been covered the research objective. Third, each identified meaning unit was labeled with a code in relation to the context. Thus, a code list was developed and used to facilitate the identification of concepts. The coding process was performed repeatedly to make a clearer interpretation of meanings of units. Finally, the concepts were clustered into sub-categories and sorted into broader categories that leads to the emergence of potential themes. Themes represent the underlying meaning of concepts rooted in the data from

which they arose. We used a shared Google doc file, as mentioned before, to execute the data analysis process. For example, the first theme developed and emerged from our analysis was “Importance of Publication Record: Quality or Quantity?” After having a good sense of data, the development of this theme went through a rigorous analysis where the ESDRs’ experiences related to publication quality and quantity were clustered into three different categories: response to publication quality, response to publication quantity, and mixed response (see Table 1). We identified statements under each category and assembled them in order to build an integrated narrative. It was not so easy to find commonalities between our individual datasets in the beginning, however, a continual discussion made this happen.

Table 1. An example of data analysis process

Meanings of unit	Condense meaning unit	Code	Sub-category	Category	Theme
Number of publications have a substantial impact on future career for both who want or not to stay in academia. A quality outcome of the research can also ensure better career. You do not need to slice your research results into several parts in the sake of increasing publication digits during your doctoral research. You never know what will support in future. So, both can be influential at different stages of your career.	Both the number and quality of publications in doctoral research are important, can impact on future career.	Importance of Publication	Importance of Publication	Quality or Quantity	Importance of Publication Record: Quality or Quantity

We, as novice autoethnographers, always disputed and questioned each other’s work with constructive comments that led us to transformation and new insights. Some example questions we considered were

- To what extent did we probe during data collection?
- What challenges did we face?
- What is the best possible framework we can use to incorporate each other’s interpretations?
- Will it work, if one of us focuses on capturing stories?
- How can we find common ground to accumulate our self-reflection and experiences? Do we agree with the same level that we have narrated?

Given the diversity of our research expertise, the narratives of developing our conclusions from collected data followed a strict consensus. Two examples could be helpful to understand the process of determining themes and producing narratives. The individual data analysis procedure divided us into opinions about whether four or five themes can present a relevant and comprehensive story. In the beginning, themes three and theme four were combined. However, after a close individual examination of data in line with the study objective, we came to an agreement that both themes were giving different information and could be presented under two different theme titles. Similarly, the publication cycle figure (see in results section) and its narratives under theme five required an exchange of several emails to determine the publication steps as well as the classification of pre-submission and post-submission process. This is how we came to consensus on disputed issues and tried to understand each other's stories (see the full process in Figure 1).

We also conducted multiple recursive cycles that included individual writing, discussion on writing, adding, or removing content, and re-writing to improve the draft. We started our data analysis with self-reflection notes that we have gathered over the study period. After exchanging the first draft via email, we conducted several Skype meetings to share our thoughts and opinions. We found supportive literature to build arguments and identify themes aligned with our narratives during the first round of analysis. The compilation process mainly built up on regular conversation and continuous exchange of drafts. This participatory process not only created a scope to add detail explanations about the topic but also involved us in exploring each other's thought processes (Coia & Taylor, 2009). The intention was to understand the intersection between and within the structure and agency in the doctoral program.

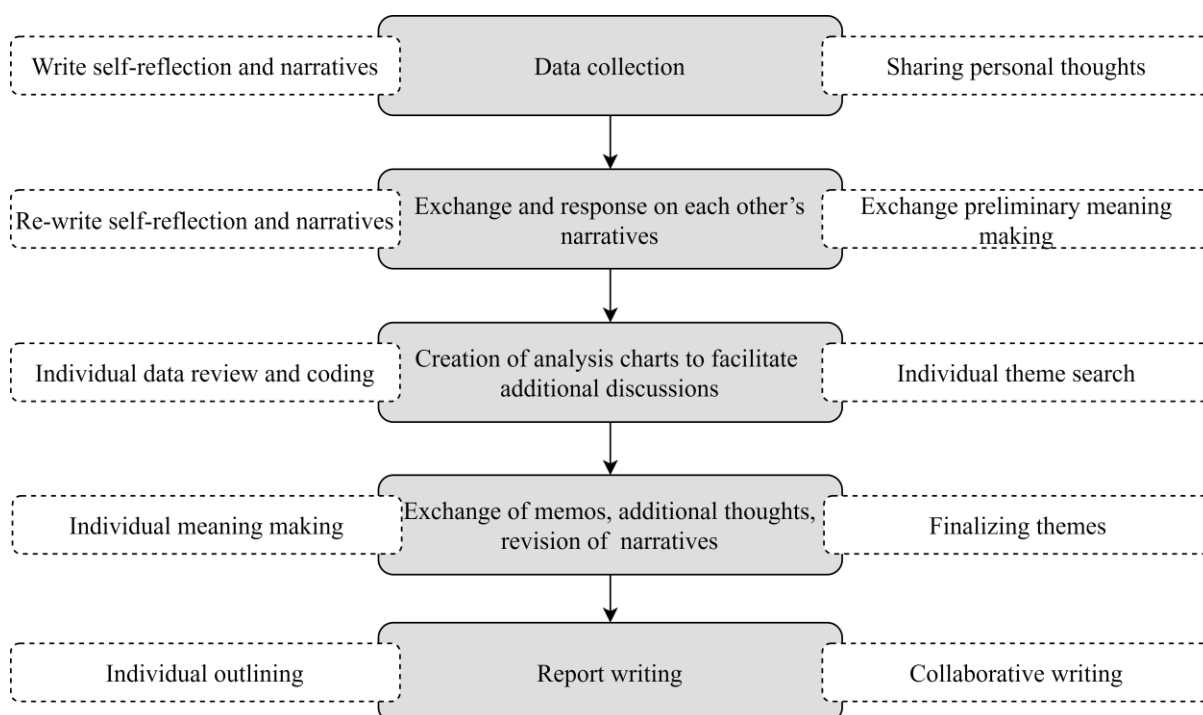


Figure 1: Visual representation of our collaboration process

On Ethical Issues

To address ethical issues in our autoethnography, we agree with the suggestion, “As you play a multi-faceted role as researcher, informant, and author, you should be reminded that

your story is never made in a vacuum and others are always visible or invisible participants in your story” (Chang, 2008, p. 69). The IRB of our institutions exempted us from a formal research ethics approval for our study as long as we did not conduct interviews (Snyder, 2015). We deliberately followed the code of confidentiality and preserved the anonymity to protect the identities of others in the story who shared their experiences with us (Kraus, 2003). We had not “reified, trivialized, vilified, or romanticized” (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 24) while telling other stories. Moreover, we obtained verbal consent and received permission from the participants in producing this manuscript as recommended by Ellis (1999, 2000). We openly discussed and disseminated the preliminary draft of this article to all available fellow researchers who had shown their interest for any clarifications. As autoethnography is a process of resisting dominant discourses (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) or promoting dialogues (Ellis, 2000), we respected the procedure while describing any intellectual debates.

Results

Insights from our Analyses and Experiences

I am a doctoral student. I am a non-native English speaker. I am doing research in a foreign country.

These three statements are self-reflecting narratives by us to bring to you a perspective that raises two cardinal questions: What are the structural challenges between a PhD program and scholarly publication? How does the ESDR cope with the context?

In the sections that follow, based on common experiences, we elaborate our autoethnographic outcomes into five key themes: (a) Importance of Publication Record: Quality or Quantity?, (b) Authorship and Recognition: Who Sits Where?, (c) Young Researchers are Prone to Publish in Leading Journals: Why?, (d) Journal Selection: What about the Readership?, and (e) Article Publication Cycle: A Comprehensive Illustration in order to describe the research topic. The analysis of our narratives discover insights on ESDRs’ perspectives while they go through the doctoral training programs in new cultural and linguistic landscapes.

Importance of Publication Record: Quality or Quantity?

There is no confirmed or straightforward answer to the question. A strong track record of scholarly publications has become an inevitable indicator to judge an individual researcher as well as to assess the doctoral outcomes. An extraordinary publication record highly influences the chances of getting suitable academic positions. Delamont et al. (2004) showed that the research teams sometimes feel pressure to publish the results in peer-reviewed journals as quickly as possible, which may compromise the quality. When talked about whether quality or quantity should get priority to disseminate research outcomes, the ESDRs debated several arguments to establish their positions.

Just look around. I can give you a number of examples of job advertisements where people are counting digits. The bindings [i.e., requirements] of a specific number of publications, therefore, can be helpful to quantify a future career path. This is one of the sensible reasons to be careerist, and rush to (re)produce and increase the quantity of publication within an earliest possible period by overlooking the quality.

I am not totally convinced with that argument. This might be true that publication digits matter, however, it depends on academic disciplines and type of research approached undertaken during a doctoral program. For instance, a study adhering to a quantitative approach could generate a number of scientific articles using various statistical analysis from a single data set. On the other hand, regarding qualitative study, there is limited access to follow the same strategy. In my opinion, one piece of research outcome can be impactful if it has academic merit, potentiality, and exciting outcomes. One exponential and comprehensive research finding can create noteworthy impact rather than a series of predatory publications. However, there is no harm to examine one model, to resolve multiple research questions, and produce two papers from one potential research project as long as the research findings generate two compatible convincing messages.

We found subsequent evidence of articles that are carrying sliced research findings as a “salami” which could be presented in one comprehensive article. This scooped up tendency could engender many dangerous issues such as the message could hype the reader, oversimplified findings can mislead, and the lofty take-home message could lead future relevant research astray. Most importantly, the “immature” finding or “half-baked idea” could really be hard to decipher. We argue that these consequences are not entirely unexpected while the competitive structural features of the doctoral program itself is explicitly pushing us to chase the boat. In other words, it is a demand-supply dilemma which is hard to avoid by the doctoral researchers.

Authorship and Recognition: Who Sits Where?

We discuss the difficulties with authorship and co-authoring in a manuscript as a common dilemma. A growing body of literature has described several components to define authorship based on contribution namely, (a) conception, planning, and execution of the research work; (b) interpretation of results; and (c) writing substantial portions of a manuscript (Shawchuck et al., 1986). Wigington (2017) suggested the *sequence-determines-credit* approach to resolve the authorship challenges of a manuscript. The matter related to co-authoring was further debated by Delamont et al. (2004) with the key concern the intellectual exploitation of the ESDRs. However, the nature of collaboration may vary differently across institutional practices, cultures, and disciplines.

My first doctoral manuscript was based on nation-wide survey data conducted by a third party. After getting ethical clearance and consulting with the data collection team, we started all the procedures to prepare a final draft of the manuscript. The team leader suddenly sent me an email and asked me to incorporate all team members' names in the manuscript. More surprisingly, they demanded to include one of them as first author of the manuscript while their contribution in writing the manuscript was minimal. Finally, my supervisor(s) and I negotiated with them and resolved the issue of first author.

By virtue of position, the supervisors “take for granted” their name will be on an ESDR’s manuscript as a co-author without direct input. We experienced, even if it is not obvious, some of our senior researchers taking this advantage in reporting research outcomes due to skill and ability in data presentation. Instances of ESDRs facing intellectual exploitation in the collaborative process are available despite substantial contributions on manuscript

writing. This academic practice, on the one hand, may demotivate the ESDRs to co-publish, while on the other hand, deprives them of learning the craft of writing academic papers.

Young Researchers are Prone to Publish in Leading Journals: Why?

We believe that publishing in a leading journal is not a problem, but the embedded belief about it is. According to Mullins and Kiley (2002), if publication is achieved in a high-status academic journal, that indicates “this work (publication) has contributed to knowledge.” It denotes an understandable justification of why ESDRs are keen to publish in a reputed journal in their respective fields. This mind-set and tendency is highly influenced by our institutional regular activities such as supervision meetings, (in)formal academic discussions, and even chatting with peers.

We always check the journal index, journal impact factor, journal quality as soon as any of our colleagues tell us about their recent publication. Sometimes the discussion evolves around “quality” of a journal during the supervision meeting, apart from our corridor chat. It is a kind of prestige that regulates an author’s reputation and exercised as a hidden rule in academia. Interestingly, we all know the calculation of a journal impact factor is highly contested, however, the practice has become an academic trend.

I came to know there are no specific rules of publication in my institution for a PhD degree. According to my supervisor, this is a bonus that will enrich the quality of my thesis. I know the particular value mainly depends on the status of the peer-reviewed journal article. Once my thesis becomes a compilation of a couple of articles in reputable journals, the outcome of my doctoral final viva will be much easier. Besides, there will be almost no option for the external examiner not to pass my thesis during assessment.

To get accepted in a top-ranking journal, we, the newcomers, sometimes compromise study outcomes. For example, once it was suggested by a journal reviewer that I focus my writing more into the policy implications and to cut off some part of the qualitative empirical evidence. It is worth mentioning that I received those recommended suggestions 6 months after submission to the journal. So, I could do nothing but to follow the recommendations under this circumstance. Other than that, the higher education syllabi, academic entrepreneurship, and careerism push us to chase leading journals in our research fields. We argue that measuring the quality and importance of publications based on a journal impact factor is a form of polarization which perpetuates academic hierarchy (formal/informal) and inclines equivocal corroboration. Publishing in a high impact factor journal may have significance, while a blind faith in it could lead to a simplified view of scholars to some extent.

Journal Selection: What about the Readership?

Once we finish writing a manuscript, the tedious job for junior researchers like us is the question of “where should I get published? And who will be my audience?” A common reason underlies the interconnectivity of the author’s recognition, fame, future career, and at the very least, academic survival. In other words, scholarly publication, selection of journals, and the readership are the gateways through which an author can maximize her/his professional rewards. Gordon (1984) described this line of reasoning as a *reward-maximization model*. He argued that, in most cases, the journal selection is influenced by the journal prestige (e.g.,

journal rank, impact factor) rather than considering the author's communication purposes. This very notion leads many to conclude that a dominant consideration of publishing is selecting the journal and the readership. However, we agree the target audiences may vary across the disciplinary paradigms.

At the beginning of my doctoral research, I was interested in and wanted to understand the local aspects of my research topic. I had progressed my work based on advice given by senior colleagues to choose a journal which published similar studies to mine in the past. I assumed that to find a suitable journal would not be difficult. Later on, however, I discovered that the topic only inspired me and might not create an appeal to the international journals. Getting published is not enough, where the articles published, and the wider readership of the journal has a crucial impact on career advancement.

Therefore, it can be argued that if the article is published in a “prestigious” journal, even with low readership as compared to a newspaper, it will not be recognized as a “significant contribution” by the academic experts (Cheung, 2008).

We, the authors of this paper, are non-native English speakers, which is an additional barrier defined as a “challenge of academic writing skill.” As newcomers in academia, we are not yet used to utilizing scholarly language in writing. Indeed, having expertise in using academic language is a prerequisite of successfully presenting our work in a meaningful way. The availability of a conclusive definition of “academic language” is sparse. According to Scarcella (2003), academic English is “a variety or register of English used in professional books and characterized by the linguistic features associated with academic disciplines” (p. 9). We believe the contexts and purposes of using language are two important features that need to be considered while writing academic papers. We often forget that English is just a language and not a “standard of intelligence” and nobody speaks academic English as their first language.

It took time for me to learn and use the academic language. I was not even aware about the academic audience. Every journal has specific readership, at least what they mention in the ‘journal information’ section, which requires a specific pattern of language.

More often, journals have their own author guidelines that slightly, yet meaningfully, differ from one another regarding word limit, specific structure, use of bibliography and so on. Sometimes we need to use acronyms, disciplinary jargons, as well as compound sentences in order to maintain required word limit of the target journal. However, we do not intend to encourage ESDRs to write a gigantic article nor a paper full of acronyms. In fact, a short paper may demonstrate a well-defined research aim and the research outcome can be impactful.

Article Publication Cycle: A Comprehensive Illustration

The breadth of topics and number of articles published in scholarly journals have undergone considerable changes during the last couple of decades. Based on an extensive discussion supported with existing literature, we identified and outlined a comprehensive article publication cycle including all the possible steps that can take place in the scholarly publication process (see Figure 2). The graphical illustration is not only supportive for ESDRs but also for all levels of academics. Starting from the drafting phase, a manuscript goes through a number of stages before a final appearance in the electronic or print media (Ali & Watson,

2016). We describe the entire scholarly process in two consecutive stages, namely pre-submission and post-submission. The pre-submission follows a range of back and forth collaborative tasks between ESDR and supervisor(s) whereas the second step refers to the editorial process and further development of the submitted manuscript by addressing experts' opinions.

Figure 2 demonstrates the article publication process regardless of disciplines enabling new academics like us to develop individually adjusted necessary steps from idea generation to get published. We intend to advocate the illustration for a greater academic benefit.

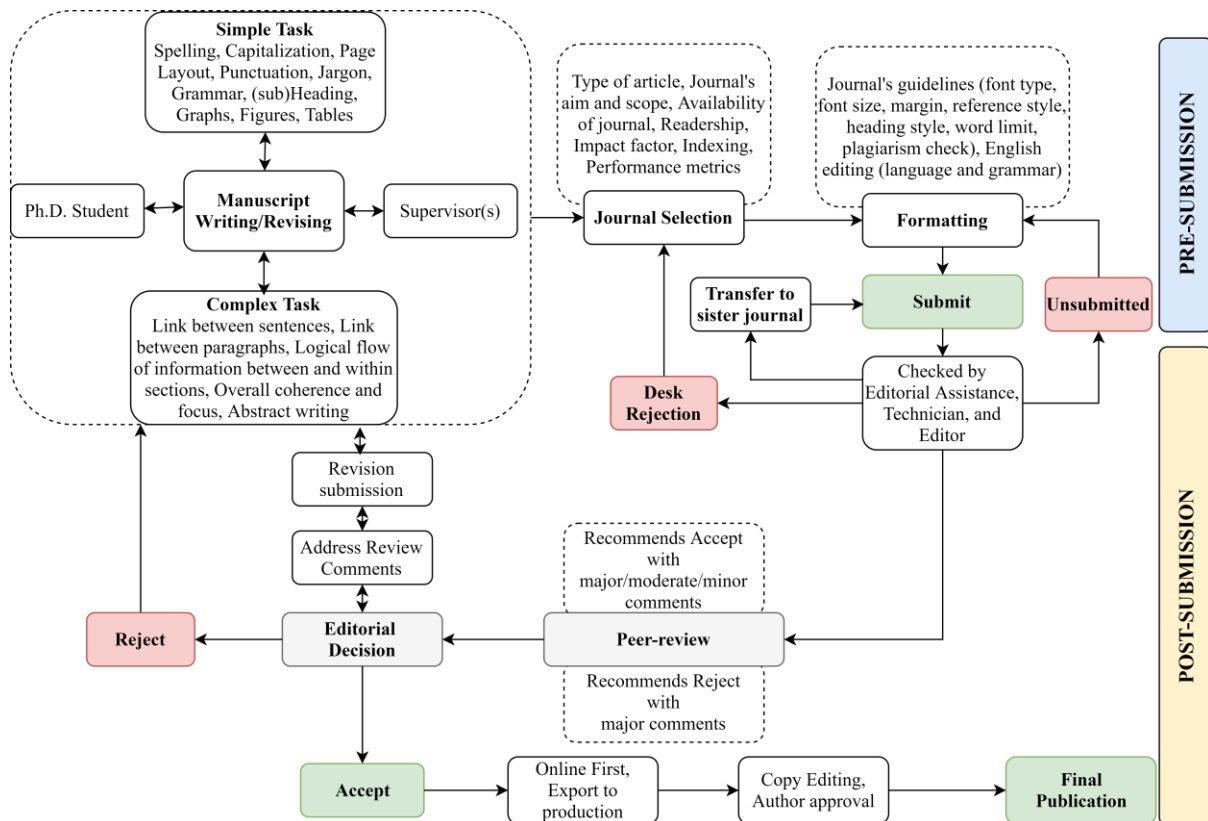


Figure 2: Publication cycle

Discussion, Limitations, and Future Implementations

“Is autoethnography subjective? Yes” (McIlveen et al., 2010, p. 609). However, to secure the conditions of a qualitative study, autoethnographer(s) should do the job as rigorously as possible (Morrow, 2005). In this duo-analytic autoethnography, thereby, we identified and shared a range of influential factors related to the doctoral program that nudge us to look for a short-cut to publication. Many of us perceived a fast-track publication can secure the originality of our research findings which, in turn, may produce premature outcomes and present incorrect or incomplete work. Roberts (1991) described that the rapid or ultrafast publication (alternatively, rush to publish) tendency is exacerbated by heightened competition among researchers.

Furthermore, the implicit yet an obvious pressure of publication generates subsequent adverse implications on ESDRs such as stress, isolation, and even increases the likelihood of attrition or withdrawal from the program (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012; Jairam & Kahl Jr, 2012; Levecque et al., 2017; Powell, 2004; Shen, 2015). A new doctoral researcher, for instance, is

quite unprepared to cope with the changes and dramatic upheaval in the doctoral education program (Gruszczynska, 2016). The transition process somewhat creates a feeling of emptiness while it comes with post-PhD career and so on. Most times, we face harsh reality for being disconnected from sources of support (e.g., networking, professional development, or career advice) while pursuing the degree. However, the level of support varies across disciplines and cultural contexts.

In this narrative, we tied our common understanding back to the existing literature on the topic that creates a myriad of opportunities, yet also involved some challenges, for all ESDRs. The contribution to specific disciplinary paradigms in the existing knowledge depends on cultural determinants (Seddon, 2010). The importance of these determinants are pivotal to the accomplishment of a PhD. We believe new knowledge can be constituted in distinct ways such as methodological innovation, theoretical development, or evidence-based experience (Calvo et al., 2010). We argued for and against the contemporary scholarly publication evaluation process which should not be the only determinant to measure the potentiality of a researcher. In other words, we call for a change in the common tendency of seeing doctoral research output as “individual success” rather than “research excellence.” As an intellectual journey, doctoral education is rather a social or learning process (Davies & Rolfe, 2009; Thomson & Walker, 2010). If not, the “construction of knowledge” will turn into a “commodity” that can be parceled up (Hyland, 2016).

Our autoethnography (as the process of writing story described by Richardson, 1994) evoked several questions in our minds that can be considered as limitations. A number of questions namely, questions about how we valued various types of data, how we represent ourselves in the text, what would be possible responses from the reader, and how to deal with ethical issues are the shortcomings of our study. Nonetheless, the entire writing process gave us opportunities to realize the importance of experience and to reflect ourselves differently than traditional ethnography.

Based on our analysis, we mapped out some suggestions for research community as well as gave an indication of future research (see Table 2).

Table 2. Recommendation and future research

Recommendations for Practitioners	Our study will be a stimulus and an example for generating ideas from an interdisciplinary perspective; could develop a better qualitative research framework.
Recommendation for Researchers	Our narrative calls for multidisciplinary scholars, especially ESDRs, to promulgate the issue comprehensively by sharing equal thinking necessitating temporal reconsideration. Moreover, the summarized pertinent queries regarding embedded politics will be ore for the research communities.
Impact on Society	Variations in the doctoral study program are mounting dramatically along with distinct features. Thus, the benefit of our study will not only encompass the forthcoming ESDRs but also the enrolled candidates. It will inform the scope of implanted scholarly publication debates and introduce contemporary critical aspects of the doctoral program.
Future Research	Our autoethnographic narrative creates a possibility of further research to deepen the research topic more closely and precisely. We recommend formulating a further argument on the compatibility between doctoral research program and publication trends which will explore the structure-practice relationship.

We assume this autoethnography is an excellent example of the many ways to strengthen our understanding on structural challenges in current doctoral programs. Our cumulative experiences and insights not only represent an additive accumulation of each ESDR's story, but also the collocation of new directions in terms of conceptualization of scholarly publication. Concomitantly, the narrative has presented us with opportunities to witness moments that make the knowledge public from what was inherently private. Stated another way, the shared secret is uncovered to the public arena. From a methodological aspect, our writing might be an inspiration to the future autoethnographers and they will contribute more to enrich this compelling method by sharing their own experiences.

Finally, an important aspect that we, the ESDRs, need to keep in mind is that "a doctoral study is not something that no one has ever done before." Hence, it is a learning and training process that does not necessarily imply a brand-new invention, rather it is more likely a significant contribution, advancement, or alteration in existing research that can inspire someone else.

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Author Note

Atiqur sm-Rahman is currently pursuing his doctoral degree at Linköping University, Sweden in division ageing and social change. His main research area is ageism and older adults with dementia. He earned his two master's degrees in Anthropology and in Clinical Social Work from Bangladesh; and obtained post-master degree in Smart Community Design and Management at University of Trento, Italy. He has expertise in qualitative research. Please direct correspondence to atiqur.rahman@liu.se.

Dr. Yasmin Jahan is doing her Ph.D. research at Hiroshima University, Japan. She has completed her medical degree (MBBS) and Master of Public Health (MPH) degree from two reputed universities and has a significant number of publications in clinical research. Her main research interest falls into public health and non-communicable diseases.

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