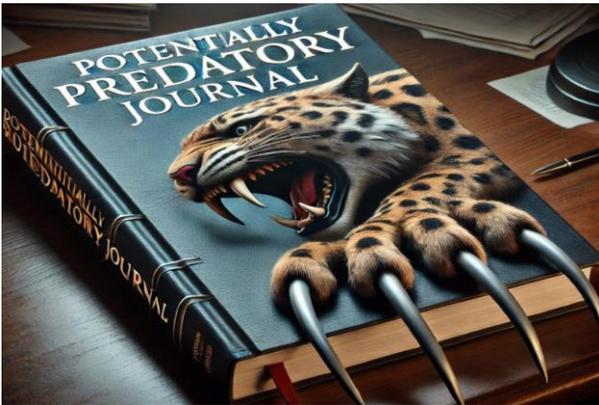


RESEARCH CONNECTION

University students' knowledge of potentially predatory journals: A focus group analysis

By Rainer Schira, MLIS, & Chris Hurst, MLIS



Why this research is important

Potentially predatory journals publish articles that are likely substandard, as these journals do not have any quality control, such as peer review or even basic editing. Many articles published in these journals disseminate erroneous information. While seasoned researchers should be able to distinguish good research from bad-quality research, students, on the other hand, may not have the necessary background knowledge to do so and might, therefore, use and learn wrong information. No other studies have been published to determine if students know about PPJs, nor if they use them knowingly or otherwise.

What you need to know

We are interested in undergraduate students' use of potentially predatory journals (PPJs). In a previous study, we found that 0.34% of their journal citations were from PPJs. For this study, we conducted focus groups with 12 students to discuss their research habits, how they choose articles for their papers, and their knowledge about peer review, Open Access, and PPJs.

How the research was conducted

We asked students for permission to collect their bibliographies from their research assignments to see how many of them are potentially predatory journal articles. We also asked for volunteers to take part in focus groups. Twelve students participated in three focus groups lasting an average of 45 minutes each. Using a mixed methods approach and classical content analysis, we analyzed the focus group transcripts to determine themes.

What the researchers found

An analysis of their bibliographies showed that none of the students in the focus groups used PPJs in their assignments. Our main findings were that these 12 students primarily used library-linked databases or Google Scholar for their academic research, which is surprising. We expected students to use Google (the everyday version, not Google Scholar) more often. Further study is needed to determine how typical this is of undergraduate students. We also found that students use critical thinking skills to determine which articles to use for their assignments but often lack the time to be thorough about it. Peer review is a very important criterion for students, since their professors often require peer reviewed articles for their assignments. Students know relatively little about Open Access and even less about PPJs. Both concepts are not often talked about in their classes and are not mentioned as part of their assignments. Finally, students expect there to be quality control for the information they access through the library. They trust articles found through the library's website.

How this research can be used

This research helps us to understand where students search for information and how they determine what sources to use for their assignments. It points out that they do not know much about PPJs and their potential pitfalls. We can use this information to better help students in finding acceptable research for their assignments.

About the researchers

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