

Should I publish in I edit? A retrospective study for some academic journals in Turkey universities

Editör olduğum yerde yayın yapmalı mıyım? Türkiye üniversitelerince yayınlanan bazı akademik dergiler üzerine retrospektif bir çalışma

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The editors and editorial board members (EBMs) of scientific journals have the potential of contributing to scientific production of their journals by producing editorials, which is part of their job, and original research papers and reviews in their fields of expertise (Hoey, 1999). However, being in a situation like "editors as authors" poses a great responsibility for chief editors to avoid misconduct by bringing about self-publication cases. Although we have little evidence for self-publication practices of journal editors (Bošnjak et al., 2011), it is still an ethical issue particularly for EBMs of journals to be authors in journals they work for, unless transparency in standard review process is guaranteed. This can simply be done by declaring that the EBMs are not involved in the review and the final decision-making of publication of a manuscript they are authors of. In fact, the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) reported in their guides to ethical editing for new editors that editors are recommended to describe that peer review of submissions from editors and EBMs are handled independently of the submitters (COPE, 2016; see also <https://publicationethics.org/case/editor-author-own-journal>). More importantly journals are expected to declare to their readers and authors that their peer-review process is devoted to high standards of scientific rules and publication ethics through following the 'Editorial Policy' of the 'Council of Science Editors' and the guidelines provided by COPE for dealing with scientific misconduct one of which is self-publishing.

Despite all, it is a fact that there exists a universal hearsay that scientists who are also members of an editorial board preferentially publish their scientific work in the journal(s) where they actively

work for (Mani et al., 2013). Technically, one may see no obstacle for such cases as far as transparency is guaranteed, but should there be a limit for such preferences of journals? We performed a retrospective analysis to provide an answer to this question by presenting the current situation in Turkey with special reference to journals published by Institutes of Natural Sciences and Science Faculties of different universities in the country. For this purpose, we randomly chose 10 journals published in 10 universities and analyzed their 5 years archives from 2015 to 2019. All published materials during this period were listed for each journal and the number of published cases with authors who are also listed in the editorial boards of the corresponding journals were recorded. Publications in each volume were analyzed with the corresponding editorial board of that volume. We achieved to reach most of the volumes in most cases, but in a few, volumes had no corresponding board lists (no full issue was uploaded to the archives) and we used the editorial board list closest to such missing volumes in terms of date. For instance, if a journal started to include its full issue by 2017, we considered each issue starting with 2017 with its own and used the oldest board list in 2017 for volumes of 2015 and 2016. We considered the numbers of volumes published, the total numbers of publications of all types appeared in these volumes, the numbers (and the ratios in total) of volumes including EBMs as authors and the numbers of such publications for the evaluations. The numbers of different EBMs as authors in the obtained lists were recorded for each journal and these numbers were used to reach a "self-publishing" ratio for each journal. The results are given in Table 1.

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Table 1. The 5 year publication details of 10 journals based on EBMs as authors
Table 1. Editor kurulu üyelerinin yazar olma durumlarına göre 10 derginin son 5 yıldaki yayın detayları

	Adiyaman University Journal of Science (J1)	Afyon Kocatepe University Journal of Science and Engineering (J2)	Bilecik Seyh Edebali University Journal of Science (J3)	Bitlis Eren University Journal of Science (J4)	Celal Bayar University Journal of Science (J5)	Erciyes University Journal of the Institute of Science and Technology (J6)	Gazi University Journal of Science (J7)	Gümüşhane University Journal of Science and Technology Institute (J8)	Trakya University Journal of Natural Sciences (J9)	Yüzüncü Yıl University Journal of the Institute of Natural and Applied Sciences (J10)
How many volumes were published?	10	15	10	12	18	15	20	13	10	11
What is the total number of publications (all types included)?	82	510	109	281	384	120	506	203	89	101
How many volumes included publications with EBMs as authors?	7	14	9	10	10	3	12	5	5	5
What is the ratio of "self-publishing" volumes?	70*	93*	90*	83*	56	20	60*	38	50	45
How many publications appeared with authors who also serve as EBM of the journal?	11	33	20	25	17	3	19	9	8	7
What is the ratio of publications with EBMs as authors?	13.41*	6.47	18.34*	8.89	4.42	2.5	3.75	4.43	8.99	6.93
How many different EBM names appeared in "self-published" papers?	8	12	14	16	13	3	11	7	5	5
What is the highest number of publications belonging to one single EBM?	3	6	4	6	3	1	4	2	3	2
What is the percentage of publications of EBMs with the highest number of publications?	27.27	18.18	20.00	24.00	36.36	33.33	21.05	22.22	37.50	28.57

The data given in the table provided us a general pattern for self-publishing in the selected journals, but more importantly, individual cases in the table should be paid more attention to define a tendency, if any, or discrete prominent cases. We highlighted some important outcomes of the results (shown with * in Table 1) which we think in general that the sampled journals have too much in their hands to evade ethical issues in terms of self-publishing, although some point data can be considered from a different perspective. The average ratio of publications with EBMs as authors in the total publications in all studied journals was measured as 6.37%, meaning that of the 2385 publications 152 can be regarded as self-published. If we leave the individual journal ratios aside, this value is invaluable. As one can see from the obtained data, the ratio of "self-publishing" volumes ranged from 20% to 93% and 5 journals (J2 > J3 > J4 > J1 > J7) were found to have ratios equal to and exceeding

60%. On the other hand, we are aware that this type of high ratio based only volume numbers cannot be used alone as a proper metric to accuse a journal for its high-self publishing ratio, but when it is evaluated with other data we used in our analysis, it provides good insights about our specific question. For instance, when we considered these 5 journals, the ratio of publications with EBMs as authors in the total publications were 18.34% for J3 and 13.41% for J1. These two values are relatively high when compared to J2, J4 and J7 but the relatively lower values for these latter journals resulted from the high numbers of total publications these journals they published over the 5 years period. This is a dilution effect which kept self-publishing ratios at low values. On the other hand, we should point out that J2, J4 and J7 are listed in the top 4 journals in terms of the numbers of publications with authors who are also EBMs of the respective journals. So, should we discredit J1

and J3 for their high publications with editorial board members as authors ratios or should we approach with caution to J2, J4 and J7 which can potentially be considered as journals using their resources for the sake of their editorial board members? We have to emphasize here that it is not the priority of this evaluation to expose any kind of operational malfunction of university journals, if any, but to present the existing situation for those concerned.

Another important point to be considered is the percentage of publications of EBMs with the highest number of publications. As it is clear from the obtained data, this percentage ranged from 18.18% to 37.50%, the latter measured for J9. However, the low number of publications with editors as authors in J9 has the potential of causing misevaluation if we pay attention to this relatively high value of the journal. Instead, it is more meaningful to look closer to journals with higher number of publications with editors as authors and higher number of different names in these publications. For instance, 16 EBMs of J4 published 25 publications in total in their journals and the name of one board member appeared in 6 of these publications. Similarly, of the 33 publications of J2, 6 appeared with the name of one board member alone or with co-authors. The most interesting thing for us see in the obtained data was that the papers of editors as authors, particularly those with a high publication ratio as in the case of J2 and J4, appeared in their journals not covering the whole 5 years period but in more limited time periods, generally in 2 consecutive years.

Keeping in mind the known cases of self-publishing cases (Schiermeier, 2008; Luty et al., 2009; Mani et al., 2013), we underline the importance of meeting ethical criteria for all steps of publication process for all journals to protect their own prestige against mischievous attempts of authors outside or inside their journals. No journal except J7, J8, J9 and J10 have explanations on their journal websites regarding the ethical rules. Moreover, none of them except J9 is declaring that the EBMs are not involved in the review and the final decision-making of publications they are authors of. More importantly, the ratio of current COPE membership among these 10 journals is 10%, but we should qualify J8 here since we officially know that they have already applied for COPE membership. In this manner, it is advised to all university journals to be a member of COPE to protect themselves against ethical problems. For instance, it may be hard and plausible to prevent editorial board members to publish in journals they

work for but, to keep away from hearsay, journals should operate an in-built agreement among their editorial board members to avoid high "self-publishing" ratios, although transparency is guaranteed. We tried to take a picture of a small sample size and, although some individual data we analysed might be considered cautiously, we are pleased to see our academic publishing in universities, at least those included in our study, operate in the right direction consciously or not. However, we take it as our duty to caveat here for chief editors to maintain this notable course keeping in mind some individual ethical problems occurred in Turkey in the past as in the case of the publisher World Association of Science, Engineering and Technology (WASET) where the highest number of publications belonged to a single "author" who published 46 times in publishers' platforms.

It is possible to see self-publication cases, although not much in number, in various journals in the world but such cases mainly come from medical journals (Rösing et al., 2014; Mani et al., 2013; Luty et al. 2009). In some cases, one may think that editors and EBMs find it easy to publish where they edit because they have the considerable power in their hands (Roth, 2002). This may be one of the reasons for self-publication cases. Alternatively, publications originating from particular fields of science can be narrowly focused and therefore applicable for publishing in a narrow range of journals, which may also end up with self-publishing cases (Zdeněk, 2018). For instance, a journal published on basic mycology by Selçuk University Mushroom Application and Research Center published 93 publications of various types during the 5 years period we performed our analyses and we determined that 59 of these publications are "self-publishing" cases by having one or more EBM names in their titles.

In conclusion, we suggest journals to become COPE members as soon as possible and follow their guidelines for their publication processes to avoid ethical issues related with self-publication cases. This will inevitably minimize self-publication cases, if any, and also will help journals to improve their qualities which they will need to be indexed in widely accepted indexing and abstracting platforms.

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