

Peer-review Comments and Author Responses

Reviewer 1

1. *I recommend, refining the language for clarity and precision. This will provide a smooth flow of ideas for the readers and will make your arguments more compelling. You should consider incorporating statistics and data related to authorship issues and plagiarism, if available. Quantitative evidence will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the magnitude of the problems. Moreover, addressing global perspectives will expand the discussion, you could explore if these ethical issues vary across academic disciplines, institutions, or even broader continents. Are these issues similar in the USA than in China?*

Thank you. As requested, we have refined language for clarity and precision and made changes to provide a smooth flow of ideas for the readers. We added some statistic data to corroborate our arguments; and addressed the problem from a global perspective as suggested. Now, we included data showing that Chinese institutions were involved in most cases of retracted papers due to paper mills.

2. *Finally, you should propose specific changes to the evaluation system that could promote a more ethical approach to authorship. This could include recommendations or suggestions for transparency measures, or alternative metrics to prioritize research integrity. I trust these recommendations will be helpful in elevating the quality and impact of your manuscript.*

We proposed specific changes to promote a more ethical approach to authorship. In short: 1- raise awareness among students regarding ethics; 2- openly punish unethical behavior. Here we mention as an example how China dealt with this issue; 3- raise awareness among institutions that the current scoring system is the root of the problem; 4- propose that institutions should consider alternative systems of metrics in order to include different patterns of work/production.

Reviewer 2

3. *Structure and Flow: The paper lacks a clear structure and logical flow. It jumps between different topics and sources without a smooth transition. Consider restructuring the paper to follow a more coherent flow, starting with a clear introduction, followed by distinct sections discussing various aspects of authorship issues and a conclusion.*

Thank you. As requested, we have made structural changes to provide a smooth flow of ideas for the readers.

4. *Clarity: The paper includes some complex sentences and phrases that could be simplified for clarity. For instance, in the first paragraph, the phrase "the 'publish or perish' ambiance has overtaken most academicians" could be rewritten for clarity. Additionally, some sentences are big and could be divided into shorter, easier to understand.*

We have rewritten sentences for clarity. Sentences that were too big were also rewritten to become easier to read.

5. *Evidence and Examples: The paper mentions various issues related to authorship, such as scientific salami slicing, paper mills, and plagiarism. To make the discussion more*

informative, it would be beneficial to provide specific examples or case studies of these issues to illustrate the concepts discussed.

In the original manuscript we have provided some examples for authorship issue. Forgery authorship: we mention the exchange of letters in the BMJ (Smith, 1994 and Bird, 1995). Plagiarism: We mention a paper on metrics for career decisions as a source for malpractice and misbehavior that was retracted due to self-plagiarism (De Vecchis & Ariano, 2023). While we agree specific examples help to illustrate the concepts being discussed, we chose not to do a list of examples for each one of the issues being discussed. This would make the text too lengthy and tiring to the reader, which is not suited for an editorial. Nonetheless, we included an additional example to illustrate the Paper Mill issue. We now mention statistical data showing that Chinese institutions were involved in most cases of retracted papers due to paper mills.

6. *Grammatical and Typographical Errors: The paper contains typographical errors and awkward phrasings.*

We have rewritten sentences for clarity and corrected typographical errors.

7. *In the sentence: "This tendency to count raw numbers independent of quality has led to controversial phenomena," it should be "independently of quality" instead of "independent of quality."*

Thank you. We corrected this error.

8. *In the sentence: "Last but not least is plagiarism. This inappropriate conduct refers to presenting someone else's work or ideas as one's own," there should be a period after "own," or consider rephrasing for better clarity.*

Thank you. We corrected this error.

9. *In the sentence: "There is no question that authorship issues lie in the ethical sphere," it should be "there is no question that" for improved clarity.*

That sentence has been rewritten.

Reviewer 3

10. *Discussion Depth: The paper touches on various authorship issues but lacks in-depth analysis and discussion of each. It could be improved by providing more detailed insights into the causes and consequences of these issues, as well as potential solutions.*

The authorship issue is indeed interesting and certainly deserves a great deal of attention. Nonetheless, the purpose of the editorial is not to make an extensive and detailed review on the subject, but to raise awareness to the problem. Nonetheless, we did improve discussion of the subject and added potential solutions at the final paragraph.

11. *Engagement with Existing Literature: While the paper references various studies and sources, it could benefit from a more extensive engagement with existing literature on the*

topic of authorship issues in academic publishing. This would help place the paper in the broader context of the field.

Certainly, this is a topic that generates a rich discussion and each one of the issues we mention could be extensively addressed in individual papers. As mentioned above, the purpose of the editorial is to raise awareness of the current situation regarding authorship. We discuss the different reasons that led papers to be retracted and offered examples from the literature to illustrate them. However, it is not the intention of the current paper to go into a deep review and discussion on the subject or to dissect thoroughly each of the examples provided.

12. *Author Recommendations: The paper discusses the need for change in the academic evaluation system but does not provide specific recommendations or solutions. Including practical suggestions for addressing authorship issues would enhance the paper's value.*

Thank you for this suggestion. In the new version of the manuscript, we propose specific changes to promote a more ethical approach to authorship. In short: 1- raise awareness among students regarding ethics; 2- openly punish unethical behavior. Here we mention as an example how China dealt with this issue; 3- raise awareness among institutions that the current scoring system is the root of the problem; 4- propose that institutions should consider alternative systems of metrics in order to include different patterns of work/production.

13. *Conclusion: The paper lacks a clear and concise conclusion that summarizes the main points and takeaways for the reader. Adding a well-structured conclusion would provide a satisfying ending to the paper.*

As requested, we add a paragraph to conclude the paper.

14. *Overall, the paper addresses a relevant and important topic in academic research, but it requires improvements in structure, clarity, and the depth of discussion. It would benefit from a more organized and focused approach to effectively give his message to the readers.*

Thank you. We believe our changes based on reviewers' suggestions improved the quality of the manuscript.