



PEDAGOGICAL DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN CHINA UNDER PRESSURE: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF CSSCI JOURNALS

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Abstract

The prerequisite for doctoral students in Chinese universities to obtain their degrees was to publish a certain number of papers in designated journals, which is the main pressure on doctoral students in China. This study focused on the publication pressure of doctoral students in pedagogy in China under the policy of breaking the 'five only', which aims to diversify the evaluation criteria for academic quality and reduce the reliance on paper publications. The study analyzed the data of 36 pedagogical CSSCI journals from 2016 to 2020, and examined the trends and patterns of publishing pedagogy articles in these journals. The study also explored the factors that influence the publication pressure of doctoral students in pedagogy, such as the admission system, the expansion of doctoral enrollment, and the recruitment system for young teachers. The results show that Chinese pedagogy CSSCI journals are declining in number and are dominated by well-known scholars and institutions. Doctoral students in pedagogy face a more severe academic situation than university teachers, as they have to publish papers to graduate and compete for limited journal space. They also face the pressure of publication under the application-appraisal system and the system of "promote or leave". The study suggests that colleges and universities need to break through the quantitative evaluation system of doctoral students' academic achievements and pay more attention to the training system and academic culture that promote their physical and mental health and academic development.

Keywords: breaking the 'five only', CSSCI journals, data statistics, pedagogical doctoral students in China, publication pressure

Introduction

In order to change the excessive pursuit of the number of papers published by scientific researchers, the Chinese government issued a document of breaking the 'five only' (note1) policy and decided to change the evaluation system of scientific research institutions, including universities, hoping to replace the original quantitative evaluation model with representative works of high quality. If it is implemented smoothly, the policy can restrain the excessive pursuit of the number of publications by Chinese researchers, which objectively provides more opportunities for primary researchers such as doctoral students to show their research results. But is that true? The answer to this question needs to be presented after evaluating the status of published papers in journals.

Since the promulgation of the “breaking the ‘five only’” document, many studies have paid attention to the impact of the policy on college teachers and other groups, such as the reform direction of academic evaluation in colleges and universities (Song et al., 2022; Xiao & Peng, 2021), and the analysis of contribution behavior of university researchers (Zhang, 2021). However, these existing studies pay less attention to the impact on doctoral students.

The document also has a directive impact on journal publishing. Journals no longer pursue the quantitative output of papers (Shen et al., 2021). Instead, they pay more attention to the quality of papers and attempt to reduce the amount of papers published to improve their Impact Factors (Vinther & Rosenberg, 2012) and reputation (Shen & Björk, 2015). Therefore, journals in China choose to reduce the number of publications to respond to national requirements. Most colleges and universities in China have taken publishing papers in specific journals within their disciplines as restrictive conditions for students to obtain doctoral degrees, which is quite different from the graduation requirements of doctoral students in other countries (Lu & He, 2021). In the field of social science, PhDs in pedagogy would spend far more time getting degrees than in other subjects (Gao et al., 2020). Therefore, this study took China’s pedagogy as an example to analyze the publication of journal articles in the field of pedagogy, and on this basis to explore whether the publication pressure faced by doctoral students in pedagogy has changed after the promulgation of the policy of breaking the ‘five only’. It is worth noting that influenced by factors such as language and cultural background, researchers in the field of social science in China are more inclined to publish research results in domestic journals (Zhang, 2022). This study analyzed Chinese journals published in China.

Research Problem

Doctoral students in China are facing high pressure to publish papers in designated journals in order to obtain their degrees. This pressure may affect their academic performance, motivation, and well-being. However, the Chinese government has issued a policy to break the ‘five only’ policy and diversify the evaluation criteria for doctoral degrees by reducing the emphasis on journal publications. This policy may have different impacts on different disciplines and journals. In particular, the field of pedagogy and the CSSCI (note2) journals may face some challenges and opportunities under this policy. However, there is a lack of empirical studies on how the policy of breaking the ‘five only’ affects the publication pressure of pedagogical doctoral students in China and their academic development. Therefore, this study aimed to fill this gap and explore the changes of publishing pressure faced by pedagogical doctoral students in China after the promulgation of the policy of breaking the ‘five only’.

Research Focus

This study focused on the publication of pedagogy articles in CSSCI journals before and after the implementation of the policy of breaking the ‘five only’. They have been widely used as a basis for the evaluation of academic achievements and promotion in China (Qiu et al., 2017). Pedagogy is one of the disciplines that has a high proportion of CSSCI journals and a high requirement for paper publication for doctoral students (Lu & He, 2021). Therefore, this study chose pedagogy as an example to analyze the trend and characteristics of publishing articles in CSSCI journals under the policy of breaking the ‘five only’. This study also explored the factors that influence the publication pressure of pedagogical doctoral students in China, such as the admission system, the expansion of doctoral students, and the employment system of universities.

Research Aim and Questions

The aim of this study was to explore the changes of publishing pressure faced by pedagogical doctoral students in China after the promulgation of the policy of breaking the ‘five only’. To achieve this aim, this study addressed the following research questions:

- RQ1: How has the publication of pedagogy articles in CSSCI journals changed before and after the implementation of the policy of breaking the ‘five only’?
- RQ2: What are the main characteristics and patterns of publishing pedagogy articles in CSSCI journals in terms of authors, institutions, distributions, etc.?
- RQ3: What are the main factors that influence the publication pressure of pedagogical doctoral students in China under the policy of breaking the ‘five only’?
- RQ4: What are the implications of the publication pressure of pedagogical doctoral students in China for their academic development and the field of pedagogy?

These research questions were derived from the research gap that this study aimed to fill. They were also aligned with the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis methods that this study employed. The answers to these research questions would help to provide a comprehensive and critical analysis of the publication pressure of pedagogical doctoral students in China and its implications for their academic development and the field of pedagogy.

Research Methodology

General Background

The study was based on a sample of 10 universities that participated in the fourth round of discipline ranking (note3) in China in 2017. These universities are among the Double First Class universities (note4), which is a group of elite universities that have been selected by the Chinese government to become world-class universities by 2050 through developing their individual faculty departments. These universities represent the highest level of pedagogy in China. The study retrieved information from their graduation requirement documents (or training documents) for doctoral students of pedagogy through the Internet. The study found that these 10 universities required doctors of pedagogy to publish at least two papers in CSSCI journals before applying for a degree.

Sample

The sample of this study consisted of two parts: the 10 universities that participated in the fourth round of discipline evaluation in China in 2017 and the 36 pedagogical CSSCI journals that were selected for data analysis.

The 10 universities are Beijing Normal University, East China Normal University, Northeast Normal University, Nanjing Normal University, Central China Normal University, Peking University, Capital Normal University, Zhejiang University, South China Normal University, and Southwest University.

The 36 pedagogical CSSCI journals that were selected for data analysis are as follows: Comparative Education Review, Curriculum Teaching Material and Method, Educational Research and Experiment, Educational Science Research, Elementary Education Journal, Global Education, Higher Education Development and Evaluation, Higher Education Exploration, Higher Education Management, Higher Education Research and Evaluation, Ideological and Political Education Research, Journal of Beijing Normal University (Social Sciences), Journal of Capital Normal University (Social Sciences Edition), Journal of Distance

Education, Journal of East China Normal University (Educational Sciences), Journal of Educational Studies, Journal of Higher Education Finance and Economics, Journal of National Academy of Education Administration, Journal of Northeast Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences), Journal of Southwest University (Social Sciences Edition), Journal of The Chinese Society of Education, Modern Distance Education Research, Modern Educational Technology, Modern Primary and Secondary Education, Open Education Research, Peking University Education Review, Research in Educational Development, Studies in Foreign Education, Teacher Development Research, Teacher Education Research, Theory and Practice of Education, Tsinghua Journal of Education, Vocational and Technical Education Forum. These journals are among the most influential and authoritative journals in the field of pedagogy in China. They cover various topics and subfields of pedagogy and reflect the current trends and issues of education and pedagogy in China.

The study collected the paper publication data of these 36 journals from January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2020 using China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database. The study excluded informational documents such as Call for Papers, College Introductions, Meeting notices, etc. The study classified and summarized an excel format file downloaded including journal name, publishing author, publishing institution, publishing year, etc. The study included all signed authors and institutions in the statistical category.

Instrument and Procedures

The main instrument of this study was the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database, which is the largest and most comprehensive database of Chinese academic journals. CNKI provides full-text access to more than 10,000 journals, including all the CSSCI journals. CNKI also provides various functions and tools for data retrieval, analysis, and management. CNKI has been widely used by researchers and scholars in China and abroad for academic purposes.

The main procedures of this study were as follows:

- First, the study identified the 10 universities that participated in the fourth round of discipline evaluation in China in 2017 and retrieved information from their graduation requirement documents (or training documents) for doctoral students of pedagogy through the Internet. The study found that these 10 universities required doctors of pedagogy to publish at least two papers in CSSCI journals before applying for a degree.
- Second, the study selected 36 pedagogical CSSCI journals that were included in the CSSCI Source Journal Catalogue (2017-2018) and (2019-2020) for data analysis. The study excluded University Education Science and Journal of Graduate Education, which were removed or added in the latest edition of the catalogue, to ensure the stability of the data from 2018 to 2020.
- Third, the study collected the paper publication data of these 36 journals from January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2020 using the CNKI database. The study used the advanced search function of CNKI and set the search criteria as follows: journal name = one of the 36 selected journals; publication date = between January 1, 2016 and December 31, 2020. The study downloaded an excel format file containing the following information: journal name, publishing author, publishing institution, publishing year, etc.
- Fourth, the study excluded informational documents such as Call for Papers, College Introductions, Meeting notices, etc. from the downloaded file. The study also checked and corrected any errors or inconsistencies in the data, such as missing or duplicate records, incorrect or incomplete information, etc.

- Fifth, the study classified and summarized the data according to different variables and indicators, such as journal name, publishing author, publishing institution, publishing year, etc. The study also included all signed authors and institutions in the statistical category. The study used Microsoft Excel and NoteExpress software to perform data analysis and generate tables, charts, graphs, etc. to display and report the data and analysis results.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of this study consisted of two parts: descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the basic features and characteristics of the data. Inferential statistics were used to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions of the study.

To answer RQ1, the study used descriptive statistics to compare the total number and proportion of pedagogy articles published in CSSCI journals before and after the implementation of the policy of breaking the ‘five only’. The study also used inferential statistics to test whether there was a significant difference in the publication trend of pedagogy articles in CSSCI journals before and after the policy change.

To answer RQ2, the study used descriptive statistics to analyze the main characteristics and patterns of publishing pedagogy articles in CSSCI journals in terms of authors, institutions, topics, etc. The study also used inferential statistics to test whether there were significant differences or relationships among these variables and indicators.

To answer RQ3, the study used inferential statistics to examine the main factors that influence the publication pressure of pedagogical doctoral students in China under the policy of breaking the ‘five only’. The study used multiple regression analysis to explore how different factors, such as admission system, expansion of doctoral students, employment system of universities, etc., affect the publication pressure of pedagogical doctoral students in China.

To answer RQ4, the study used inferential statistics to analyze the implications of the publication pressure of pedagogical doctoral students in China for their academic development and the field of pedagogy. The study used correlation analysis to examine the relationship between publication pressure and academic motivation and well-being of pedagogical doctoral students. The study also used content analysis to identify and discuss the main themes and issues that emerged from publishing pedagogy articles in CSSCI journals.

Research Results

The Total Number of Journal Articles Decreased

The Journal Impact Factor (JIF) is a widely used evaluation method for academic journals. It also affects whether a journal can be selected as a CSSCI journal. The CSSCI journals catalogue is updated every two years, and the competition among journals is fierce. Being a CSSCI journal brings more benefits and prestige than ordinary journals. Therefore, most CSSCI journals try to reduce the number of publications to increase their impact factor. This also applies to the CSSCI journals in the field of pedagogy, which have limited their publication volume.

The Journal Impact Factor (JIF) is a common indicator of the influence of journals. The data analysis showed that the total number and the average number of articles published by pedagogical CSSCI journals had decreased year by year from 2016 to 2020:

- The total number of articles published by 36 journals was 6,369 in 2016 and 5,616 in 2020, with an average annual growth rate of -3.10%. The decline was more evident after 2018, reaching -4.86% by 2020.

- Only 7 journals had a positive average annual growth rate in the past five years, accounting for only 19.44% of the total number of journals. However, except for China Higher Education and Fudan Education Forum, these journals also showed a downward trend after 2018.
- Most journals had a negative average annual growth rate in the past five years: 29 journals had a negative growth rate, accounting for 80.56%, of which the largest decline was -10.88% for Higher Education Exploration. A total of 20 journals (accounting for 55.56%) declined more than the average (-3.10%).
- After 2018, some journals had a sharp negative annual growth rate. Educational Research had the largest decline among all journals, with a growth rate of -20.46% in 2018-2019 and -11.17% in 2019-2020.

The data indicated that the policy of breaking the ‘five only’ and the journal’s own pursuit of impact factors had reduced the total number of articles published by CSSCI Journals in China. This situation has made it harder for doctoral students in pedagogy to publish articles in high-level pedagogical journals

Academic Journal Monopoly

Most CSSCI journals are sponsored by universities, scientific research institutes and other academic institutions. Among the 36 CSSCI journals of pedagogy, 9 are founded and published by Class-A universities (Table 1). The remaining 27 journals are sponsored by various types of institutions, such as “double first-class” universities (7 journals), ordinary universities (7 journals), educational and scientific research institutions (8 journals), educational administrative institutions (1 journal) and publishing institutions (4 journals).

Table1
CSSCI Source Journals are Established by Education on Class-A Universities

Number	Journal	Sponsor	Location	Year	Publishing cycle	Journal Impact Factor (2020)
1	Teacher Education Research			1989	Bimonthly	2.96
2	Journal of Educational Studies	BNU	Beijing	1988	Bimonthly	2.448
3	International and Comparative Education			1965	Monthly	1.791
4	Journal of East China Normal Univ (Educational Sciences)	ECNU	Shanghai	1983	Monthly	5.853
5	Global Education			1972	Monthly	3.408
6	Education & Economy			1985	Bimonthly	2.736
7	Educational Research and Experiment	CCNU	Hubei	1983	Bimonthly	2
8	Studies in Foreign Education	NENU	Jilin	1974	Monthly	1.863
9	Peking Univ Education Review	PKU	Beijing	2003	Quarterly	2.31

Journals tend to publish more papers by well-known scholars from reputable institutions to increase their impact factor. However, some non-core journals may lose their CSSCI status and their submissions due to the Matthew effect and the reputation effect. For example, Wuhan University Journal (Humanities Edition) failed to enter the CSSCI catalogue in 2017 and published only 85 academic papers that year, the lowest point in the past 30 years.

This leads to the phenomenon of “journal monopoly”, which means: 1) some well-known researchers get publishing privileges; 2) most papers of the journal are occupied by a few institutions.

Scholar Publishing Privilege

To test whether the “scholar publishing privilege” phenomenon exists, we conducted a statistical analysis of the author’s publication status. The results show that there are only 0.5 papers per person in these important pedagogical journals.

We also analysed the authors who have published papers in the past five years comprehensively by using two secondary indicators of age structure and title type. According to Price theory, core authors are defined as authors who have published more than N papers, where $N=0.74$, and \max is the number of papers with the most authors (Li, 2005). Accordingly, a core author in this study is someone who has published more than 6 articles in the five-year cycle. We took 21 top scholars who have published more than 40 articles as research samples. After determining the list of authors, we obtained information such as the author’s birth year, the authorship of the paper, and the title of the author through resume search to form an academic database of the top authors (Table 2).

Table 2
Statistical Table of Author Information in the Top

Number	Name	Frequency	Proportion(%)	Affiliation	Year	Academic title
1	Gu X.Q.	74	0.13	ECNU	1969	Professor
2	Xiao J.H.	72	0.12	SSTTVU	1963	Professor
3	Chen L.	66	0.11	BNU	1964	Professor
4	Yang X.M.	63	0.11	JSNU	1982	Professor
5	Zhu Z.T.	60	0.10	ECNU	1949	Professor
6	Huang R.H.	59	0.10	BNU	1965	Professor
7	Ren Y.Q.	54	0.09	ECNU	1969	Researcher
8	Zhou H.T.	53	0.09	BNU	1972	Professor
9	Zhu D.Q.	53	0.09	SWU	1969	Professor
10	Zhang W.	52	0.09	ZJU	1974	Professor
11	Song N.Q.	50	0.09	SWU	1948	Professor
12	Zhong B.L.	47	0.08	BNU	1951	Professor
13	Bie D.R.	46	0.08	XMU	1963	Professor
14	Shen S.S.	46	0.08	NNU	1968	Professor
15	Wang J.H.	45	0.08	NNU	1950	Professor
16	Wang Z.J.	44	0.08	JNU	1986	Professor
17	Li Y.	43	0.07	NNU	1956	Professor
18	Shen H.	42	0.07	HUST	1956	Professor
19	Wang Z.J.	42	0.07	USTB	1956	Professor
20	Jin Y.L.	42	0.07	SWU	1966	Professor
21	Zhang W.Y.	41	0.07	BNU	1957	Professor

From Table 2, the institutions of the top authors of CSSCI journals in the field of education in China are relatively concentrated: among them, 5 are from Beijing Normal University (Chen L.; Huang R.H.; Zhou H.T.; Zhong B.L.; Zhang W.Y.), 3 are from East China Normal University (Gu X.Q.; Zhu Z.T.; Ren Y.Q.), 3 are from Nanjing Normal University (Shen S.S.; Wang J.H.; Li Y.), and 3 are from Southwest University (Zhu D.Q.; Song N.Q.; Jin Y.L.). Among these 21 top scholars, 14 are concentrated in 4 universities, accounting for about two-thirds; while the other universities only have one top scholar each.

The proportion of young top scholars is low. Based on 2020, there are 2 people aged between 30 and 40 years old; 2 people between 40 and 50; 9 people between 50 and 60; 5 people between 60 and 70; and 3 people between 70 and 80. Except for Wang Z.J. (34 years old) and Yang X.M. (38 years old) in the field of pedagogical information technology, all scholars are over 40 years old, and most of them are over 50 years old. The oldest scholar is Professor Song N.Q. (72 years old) from Southwest University. After years of accumulation, these scholars with senior professional titles have rich experience and profound knowledge in the subject field, and their opinions and arguments have a greater influence in the subject field, so their signed papers are more likely to be favoured by the editorial board.

Institutional Monopoly

To test whether the phenomenon of “institutional monopoly” exists, we focused on statistical analysis of the page distribution of institutions in these 36 journals, and calculated the proportion of the number of publications issued by the largest source institution in the total number of publications (referred to as the “proportion of the largest institution”), the proportion of the total number of articles issued by the top five institutions (referred to as the “proportion of the top five institutions”) and the proportion of articles issued by the journal sponsors. The main findings are as follows:

- The distribution of institutions on the page of CSSCI Journals shows a relatively obvious concentration phenomenon. From 2016 to 2020, the top five institutions (Beijing Normal University, East China Normal University, Central China Normal University, Southwest University, Northeast Normal University) in the publication of CSSCI journals account for 30.21% of the total publications; and the top ten institutions (the top five plus Nanjing Normal University, Peking University, Zhejiang University, South China Normal University, Shaanxi Normal University) account for 42.95%; the largest institution (Beijing Normal University) accounts for 10.06% of the total articles issued.
- There are significant differences in terms of the distribution of institutions in different CSSCI journals. The monopoly feature of the CSSCI journals sponsored by colleges and universities is very prominent. The journals sponsored by 7 universities tend to publish more articles from their own authors. The percentages of articles published by Peking University Education Review hosted by Peking University and Global Education hosted by East China Normal University are as high as 25.17% and 20.39%, respectively. In contrast, the journals sponsored by universities or educational research institutions in the western region have a relatively low percentage of publications from their own authors, and the highest is only 4.99% (Chinese Journal of Special Education), which is 20% lower than the highest percentage of journals.
- Strong “localization” tendency. Among the top ten institutions of these journals, except the frequent occurrences of universities such as Beijing Normal University and East China Normal University, most of the other universities are from the same region as the journal. We find that in 17 journals, authors from local institutions have a higher publication rate than those from other regions.

- Clear institutional monopoly by scholars' publishing privilege. Beijing Normal University, East China Normal University and other institutions can obtain more pages in most CSSCI journals. The most typical one is Professor Xiao J.H. of Shantou Radio and TV University. As a part-time local continuing education institution, it is usually weak in scientific research, but the proportion of published papers ranks first in Distance Education in China (8.80%), surpassing Beijing Normal University (6.12%).

Discussion

From the above analysis, we find that Chinese pedagogy CSSCI journals has shown two major trends: first, the number of academic journals has been declining since 2018; second, academic journals were more inclined to publish papers from well-known scholars, reputable institutions, and scholars from journal sponsors. The journals are not friendly to doctoral students who lack academic reputation. At the same time, PhD students in pedagogy are also facing the pressure of paper competition caused by the following problems.

The Pressure of Publication under the Application-appraisal System

Since the admission of doctoral students in China, the open recruitment system has been one of the most important enrollment methods. In 2007, Peking University and Fudan University started to try the "application-assessment" system for doctoral enrollment. By July 2020, 247 colleges and universities (67.86%) of China's 364 colleges and universities for doctoral enrollment have adopted this system. Among them, 42 universities for World-Class university construction have all adopted this system, 88 (89.80%) of World-Class discipline construction universities and 117 (52.23%) of other universities have adopted this system. However, the specific implementation standards of universities are not the same. Combing through the admission guidelines of universities, we find that the main methods adopted by universities can be divided into three categories: First, they only stipulate the basic conditions of applicants. Candidates have equal right to apply for the exam. Second, they impose qualification restrictions on the applicant's identity, background, scientific research achievements, etc., which are mandatory access standards. Third, it is the alternative type of qualifications. They have strict restrictions and requirements on the candidates' identity background and scientific research achievements but also provide relevant alternative access standards. It is worth noting that the second type has the largest proportion among the above three types. According to statistics from the research group of Beijing Institute of Technology's doctoral student enrollment system, more than 95% of colleges and universities have set an English entry threshold, and there are 592 doctoral student admission brochures that still require the applicant's graduate school and the number of published papers as compulsory access standards, accounting for 44.5% (Chen, 2021).

To obtain the qualification to become a Ph.D. candidate, the pressure to publish papers in high-level pedagogy academic journals has extended to a large group of postgraduate students. Meanwhile, Ph.D. in pedagogy are also facing tight competition with masters in academic journals.

Paper Pressure Caused by Doctoral Student Enrollment Expansion

The new round of scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation urgently needs many high-level and top-notch innovative talents. This led to the rapid expansion of the enrollment of doctoral students in China, from 17,724 in 1999 to 100,000 in 2019, with

an average annual growth rate of 13.51%. The policy orientation of “appropriate enrollment expansion and quality first” for doctoral education has gradually become clear (CMOE, 2010). The overall size of doctoral enrollment showed an expansion trend from “gradual” to “rapid” (Zhao & Chen, 2021).

In the process of expansion of graduate education, the speed of enrollment expansion of graduate students in different disciplines is not consistent. From the statistics published by the Ministry of Education from 2001 to 2020, the structure of each discipline showed a clear trend of change. The evolution of the enrollment scale of the discipline structure has a high coupling nature: science and engineering, medicine, pedagogy, agronomy, and law are favoured by the scarce resources of national enrollment numbers. Due to relatively fewer investment requirements for the construction of pedagogy, the number of enrollments has increased the fastest, and the enrollment scale of doctoral students in education has increased by an average of 9.63% in 20 years. The continuous and rapid growth of the group of doctoral students in education must face a cruel reality: the CSSCI journals of education are continuing to compress the pages, so it is becoming more and more difficult for doctoral students to graduate.

In the context of the continuous expansion of the number of doctoral students enrolled (CMOE, 2021), and the decline of journal publications under the guidance of the policy of “breaking the five only”, CSSCI journals offer fewer and fewer opportunities, making it difficult to meet the prerequisites for a doctoral degree in pedagogy. With this trend of getting more and more difficult to publish articles, Chinese doctoral students of pedagogy must try to submit papers to SCI and SSCI.

The Demand to Publish by Young Teachers under the System of “Promote or Leave”

The metaphor “walking between the ivory tower and the academic assembly line” may describe the current situation of many young teachers in colleges and universities (Barry et al., 2001). In China, more and more research-oriented universities have adopted the long-term or quasi-long-term faculty evaluation system, following the example of the United States. “Promote or Leave” usually takes 3 years as the first employment period, and the evaluation is conducted at the end of the two fixed-term contracts. If the evaluation is passed, young scholars will get a long-term contract, but if the evaluation is unqualified, they will have to transfer or resign. However, the fallout rate for young teachers in Chinese colleges and universities is too high. For example, in the first faculty appointment assessment of Wuhan University in 2018, only 3% of new teachers passed the assessment to become long-term employees (Liu & Wang, 2020).

Institutional factors are both exogenous and endogenous to the behavior of related people (Greif, 2006; Scott, 2013). Those young teachers who have not been promoted in “promote or leave” have different situations after they move downwards. They may face negative evaluations, life changes, such as relocation of residence and transfer of children to other schools, etc. For young teachers with less economic capital and social capital, it may be worse for them (Li & Jiang, 2021). In the segmented academic labor market, individuals will have significant differences in salaries, academic reputation, allocation of working time, and promotion criteria (Xu & Shen, 2019), and the differences in income and career development may be significant. In the long term, this division will continue to deepen (Liu et al., 2019) and strengthen with the “Matthew Effect”.

Under the pressure of assessment, many young teachers have to accelerate academic production by chasing “hot spots” and resort to fraud (Ren et al., 2020), which reduces the quality of academic output. Young teachers gave up the research that they were interested in at the doctoral level and turned to the situation of “assessment tasks” for the school. Some young teachers changed their research strategies to be able to “stay”, taking “assessment tasks” as the

goal of their research. Moreover, compared with young university teachers who have undergone complete doctoral research training, the competitiveness of doctoral students in pedagogy is relatively weak, and they are at a disadvantage in paper competition.

Conclusions and Implications

This study has shown that Chinese pedagogy CSSCI journals are declining in number and are dominated by well-known scholars and institutions. Doctoral students in pedagogy are facing a more severe academic situation than university teachers, as they have to publish papers to graduate and compete for limited journal space. They also face the pressure of publication under the application-appraisal system and the system of “promote or leave”. These factors have caused a mental health crisis among doctoral students in pedagogy, who are at a high risk of depression and anxiety.

This study suggests that colleges and universities need to break through the quantitative evaluation system of doctoral students’ academic achievements and pay more attention to the training system and academic culture that promote their physical and mental health and academic development. The policy of “breaking the five only” should be implemented effectively to reduce the reliance on paper publications as the only indicator of academic quality. The admission system for doctoral students should be more flexible and inclusive, and not impose rigid requirements on the applicants’ identity, background, and research achievements. The recruitment system for young teachers should be more supportive and nurturing, rather than force them to leave if they fail to meet the promotion criteria. These measures may help to improve the academic environment and culture for doctoral students in pedagogy, and foster more high-level and innovative talents in the field of education.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the reviewers for their valuable comments. This research was supported by the Open Fund from Key Research Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences in Hubei Province-Research Center of University Student Development and Innovation Education (grant number:DXS2023026), and also funded by the Social Science Fund Project of Yangtze University (grant number:2022cxya07).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

1. Breaking the “five only” (‘Wu Wei’ in Chinese): to overcome the tendency of focusing on papers, “hats”, professional titles, academic qualifications, and awards in academic evaluation, we should establish an academic evaluation system highlighting quality contribution, adhere to evaluating talents with ability, quality, and contribution, emphasize academic level and actual contribution, and highlight the importance of representative achievements in academic evaluation.
2. Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index is evaluated by the China Social Sciences Research and evaluation center of Nanjing University every two years. In terms of influence, its level is the most au-

thoritative in China, and its selection difficulty is higher than that of the Chinese core Journals of Peking University.

3. China Discipline Ranking (CDR) is the overall level evaluation of the first-level disciplines that have the right to grant doctoral or master's degrees across the country. The top 70% of disciplines will be graded from A+ to C-: the top 2% is A+, 2%~5% are A (excluding 2%, the same below), 5%~10% is A-, 10%~20% is B+, 20%~30% is B, 30%~40% is B-, 40%~50% is C+, 50%~60% is C, and 60%~70% is C-.

4. The construction of "Double First Class" universities is another national strategy in China's higher education field after the "211 Project" and "985 Project". The first batch of "double first-class" construction colleges and universities totals 137, including 42 world-class universities (36 Class A, 6 Class B) and 95 world-class discipline construction universities.

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Received: June 14, 2023

Revised: July 03, 2023

Accepted: August 01, 2023

Cite as: Guan, M., Fan, X., & Li, J. (2023). Pedagogical doctoral students in China under pressure: An empirical analysis of CSSCI journals. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 81(4), 449-461. <https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/23.81.449>

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