International research collaboration creates higher impact

Globally, international research collaboration has gained momentum in the past decades. There is a growing recognition of the need for research collaboration internationally. With the increasingly complex and fast-changing healthcare issues that nurses and midwives are facing today, researchers would benefit greatly from international nursing and multidisciplinary expertise. International collaboration enables researchers to share their knowledge and combine the perspectives they have to solve complex problems that are increasingly cross-disciplinary in nature.\(^1\) Collaboration allows nurse researchers to access resources beyond their own, especially funding, talent and equipment to develop innovative nursing interventions for managing complex health problems. Collaboration also enables leverage and allows researchers to magnify the benefits of their own inputs and maximize their own outputs and outcomes. Global and inter-regional research collaboration may help to overcome fragmentation and lack of critical mass in investment for research.\(^1\)\(^,\)\(^2\)

There are different levels of international research collaboration. They range from exchanging ideas, data and insights, networking with international researchers, paying site visits to each other, participating in grant applications, to publishing research findings. There have been increasing numbers of international research collaborations among individual researchers, institutions and universities, and among industries and disciplines.\(^1\)

International research collaboration is particularly important for research-intensive universities. International collaboration is a critical component of the international outlook indicator, which accounts for 2.5% of the ranking formula deployed by the World University Ranking 2016–2017 – Times Higher Education.\(^2\)\(^,\)\(^3\) It is observed that research-intensive universities have much higher levels of international collaboration and that these are growing at a faster rate than the world average.\(^5\)

International research collaborations have a great impact on the productivity of nursing and midwifery knowledge, as well as on global innovations of widely applicable practices. Collaborations in nursing and midwifery research could lead to an increased amount of multiple-author publications in international journals, and much more frequent citations to such publications.\(^1\)\(^,\)\(^2\)\(^,\)\(^4\) A review of publications on ResearchGate found that 43% of all papers published in the past five years were written by international research teams – at least two authors from different countries.\(^4\)

Despite the increasing trend in international research collaboration, there are challenges. For example, overcoming language barriers when working with people from countries where the same language is not spoken, addressing issues specific to the local community, and managing the complexity of intellectual property rights.\(^2\)

A structure to facilitate collaborations is important, such as formal agreements for collaborative activities and decision-making process. To have successful outcomes from research collaborations, there must be explicit shared research goals and objectives, committed researchers with visionary leadership, and mutual respect and recognition of each other’s contributions.\(^1\)

Strategies to promote international research collaborations are needed to ensure success. At the research funding level, projects with international and cross-disciplinary collaborations are now given much higher consideration.\(^1\) Support from government and funding agencies is important to promote research collaboration. For example, the Australia Research Council is committed to enhancing international collaboration opportunities by providing funding opportunities for international collaboration, and maintaining links with research funding agencies overseas to share best practice in policy development and program delivery.\(^5\) Such support encourages researchers to engage in international, multi-site, large-scale studies.

Further, international co-authored publication is not the only indicator of international collaboration. Researchers may collaborate in sharing ideas and networking which will not be published. International collaboration is still hard to measure. There is a need to develop more reliable metrics to reward researchers for collaborating internationally.\(^2\)

The Nordic Journal of Nursing Research is an international research journal that communicates knowledge about nursing and midwifery research and development for a global readership. Global nursing and midwifery communities will benefit from sharing knowledge through this platform, which hopefully will promote international research collaboration.

References


Sally Wai-Chan
University of Newcastle, NSW, Australia
Email: sally.chan@newcastle.edu.au