

Scopus Delisting Process Behind Closed Doors: A Case Study of Nurture

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ABSTRACT

The journal Nurture (Online ISSN: 1994-1633), which publishes peer-reviewed research in the social sciences was removed from the Scopus database after a re-evaluation by the Scopus Content Selection and Advisory Board (CSAB). This article carefully explains what happened before and after the delisting, and examines whether Scopus followed its own guidelines during the review. It highlights how the reasons given by the CSAB do not match the rules and benchmarks published by Scopus. It also questions the fairness and professionalism of the CSAB and the review process. Most importantly, this article argues that the Scopus team made an unethical decision. The way they evaluated Nurture was not only unfair but also biased against journals from developing countries. The article calls for more transparency, fair practices, and accountability in the way global academic indexing platforms make decisions.

Keywords: Nurture, Scopus, CSAB, Unethical delisting

1. INTRODUCTION

Scopus is one of the largest and most widely used abstract and citation databases of peer-reviewed literature in the world. It is owned and operated by Elsevier, a major academic publishing company. Being indexed in Scopus helps a journal gain international recognition and respect. For over ten years, *Nurture* was included in Scopus, providing a platform for researchers. However, on May 8, 2024, the editorial team received a sudden notification that the journal was being re-evaluated. Scopus mentioned three reasons:

- Boost in the number of articles.
- Changes in the geographical diversity of authors.
- Differences in article topics compared to the journal's aims and scope.

The editorial team gave detailed responses to each concern.

- Boost in the number of articles: The journal published only 64 articles in 2023 after a strict peer-review process. These articles followed the aims and scope of the journal. A new and active editorial board helped bring more submissions.
- Geographical diversity: Editors from different countries helped attract articles from many regions. The editorial team saw this as a positive change.
- Change in topics: All articles matched the journal's aim and scope, which includes Social Sciences, Education, Health, Economics, and Nutrition as shown on the Scopus site (<https://www.scopus.com/sourceid/21100236616>).

The editorial team shared full documentation to prove that *Nurture* was following Scopus's rules. However, on June 4, 2024, Scopus decided to delist the journal, using reasons that do not align with their own published criteria. This shocked and upset the journal's editors and authors.

2. COMMENTS FROM THE SCOPUS CSAB

Scopus uses three main questions to decide whether to keep a journal in their database. Based on those, they shared the following reasoning.

This seems to be a broad social science journal with a team of editors and large EB based mostly in developing countries, China and CEE/Russia.

Sample papers are recent in 2022 and 2023. Three observations stand out.

1. First, almost all authors are based in developing countries and/or weak institutions. But for a journal indexed in Scopus for over a decade now, it's surprising to me that it has not yet attracted papers by authors from a broader range of institutions/countries.
2. Second, there seems to be a larger number of papers by (Chinese!) authors based in Thailand. This is quite a strange phenomenon.
3. Third, paper quality is generally weak. Most are run-of-the-mill kind of papers. Several papers have nothing to do with "Nurture" but are purely finance and management papers. Overall, this journal has gone astray in its publishing focus and strategy. Citations also reflect this - only one past paper has 11 citations and the rest of the 190+ papers are all below 10. It's time to discontinue indexing in Scopus."

These comments raised major concerns:

- The use of terms like "weak institutions" and pointing out authors from "China" and "Russia" shows unethical and biased behavior.
- The review criticized things that are not part of Scopus's own evaluation benchmarks.
- The statement that *Nurture* has "gone astray" is a subjective opinion, not an objective analysis.

3. NURTURE'S RESPONSE AND APPEAL TO SCOPUS

The editorial board sent emails to the following individuals at Scopus.

- Dr. Wim Meester (Elsevier, Amsterdam).
- Prof. Henry Wai-chung Yeung (CSAB Chair – Social Sciences).
- Prof. Julie J. Li (CSAB Chair – Business & Economics).

In their email dated June 7, 2024, *Nurture* raised the following objections.

- The decision was based on factors not mentioned in the official re-evaluation form.
- It was unethical to use words like "weak institute" and to name countries like China and Russia in a negative way.
- Editors were emotionally disturbed by the language used, and some resigned from their honorary roles.
- The team requested Scopus to review the decision fairly.

Dr. Wim Meester (Elsevier, Amsterdam) replied and explained the comments.

- As I mentioned, it is not up to me to judge the re-evaluation decisions. The decisions are made by the independent CSAB and there is the appeal procedure to request an appeal if mistakes are made. However, then the publisher needs to clearly indicate what error was made and provide evidence for that.
- There is only one paper that has accrued more than 10 citations and all other papers published in this journal to date have fewer citations is factual and not an error.
- It is remarkable that there is a group of (Chinese) authors from at least 16 papers all from the same Thai institution publishing in this title representing more than 16% of the annual output is factual and not an error.

Editorial team has replied to Dr. Wim Meester.

The nurture team has sent the following argumentative email to Dr. Wim Meester.

There is only one paper that has accrued more than 10 citations and all other papers published in this journal to date have fewer citations is factual and not an error.

- The content policy selection of Scopus (<https://www.elsevier.com/products/scopus/content/content-policy-and-selection>) is just one of the accessible sources of guidelines for maintaining the journal's indexing in worldwide databases such as Scopus. The standards state that "Once a year, Scopus analyzes the performance of all journals in the database. All journals must meet the three metrics and benchmarks listed in the table below. If a journal does not meet all three benchmarks for two consecutive years, it will be flagged for re-evaluation by the independent CSAB."

Metric	Benchmark and explanation
Self-citation rate	The journal has a substantially higher self-citation rate, when compared to peer journals in its subject field.
Total citation rate	The journal received a substantially lower number of citations, when compared to peer journals in its subject field.
Cite Score	The journal has a substantially lower CiteScore, when compared to peer journals in its subject field.

I have never discovered a standard for per-article citations. The "Nurture" meets the three standards mentioned above. The remark on per-article citations is not in line with Scopus guidelines.

- As previously stated, numerous journals have maintained a CiteScore of 0 for many years, yet they have not been delisted from Scopus, despite the fact that they fail to meet any metrics and benchmarks standards.
- The "Nurture" CiteScore for 2023 is 1.0 (<https://www.scopus.com/sourceid/21100236616>). There are no issues with self-citations or overall citations, and the CiteScore is increasing. It signifies that "Nurture" meets the metrics and benchmarks standards.

It is remarkable that there is a group of (Chinese) authors from at least 16 papers all from the same Thai institution publishing in this title representing more than 16% of the annual output is factual and not an error.

- Between the years 2023 and 2024, a total of 16 publications were produced by Kirk University, Thailand, in the journal "Nurture." This includes eight papers published in 2023 and eight articles in 2024, reflecting a 14.03% research output from the institution across the fields of research education and economics.

Table 1. Kirk University publications in 2023 and 2024.

Year	Total publication	Kirk University, Thailand		
		Social sciences: Education	Economics	Total
2023	64	5	3	8
2024 (Until June)	50	4	4	8
Total	114			16
16/114 = 14.03%				

In the years 2023 and 2024, we have published articles from various countries. A comprehensive list is provided below.

Table 2. List of countries.

2023	2024 (Until June)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Malaysia Pakistan Indonesia China United Arab Emirates Viet Nam Nigeria Korea Tunisia Philippines Nepal Jordan Thailand United States Brazil Saudi Arabia France South Africa Latvia Ecuador Russian Federation 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Indonesia Viet Nam Morocco Thailand Nigeria Peru Saudi Arabia India Korea Nepal Malaysia South Africa Russian Federation Pakistan Ghana North Macedonia Kosovo Colombia Lebanon

According to Scopus' content selection policy (<https://www.elsevier.com/products/scopus/content/content-policy-and-selection>), we focused on regional diversity and published articles from several nations. During publishing and selection, our editorial staff understood that Scopus indexed several university publications, with the bulk of articles published from a single institution. We are under the impression that Scopus does not have any concerns regarding the publication of a limited number of papers from a single university, provided that the quality of the papers is satisfactory. Please consider it a good fact that "Nurture" has published 84% of papers from various nations.

Scopus responded by providing an appeal form. The journal submitted the appeal with detailed evidence:

- Incorrect Parameters: The parameters used for delisting were different from those shared in the re-evaluation form.
- Geographic Diversity: In 2023 and 2024, *Nurture* published articles from 35 countries, including the USA, France, South Korea, and others—proving wide global participation.
- Scope of Articles: Articles were within the scope defined by Scopus, including Economics and Social Sciences.
- CiteScore and Citations: CiteScore 2023 was 1.0, which is acceptable. Per article citation counts are not listed as delisting criteria in Scopus policies.
- Ethical Concerns: Judging journals based on the nationality of authors or editors and labeling institutions as "weak" is unethical and discriminatory.

4. SCOPUS'S REPLY TO THE APPEAL

Scopus replied:

"Please thank the publishers for pointing out the points they did. But the overall judgement of the subject chair relies on many other considerations which they have not addressed and so a further assessment is very unlikely to change the result."

This vague and dismissive response failed to address the clear evidence and valid questions raised by the *Nurture* team. No specific reasons were given for rejecting the appeal, and no further details were offered.

5. DETAILED ANALYSIS OF REVIEWER COMMENTS

5.1. Author Affiliation Bias

Scopus CSAB said that many authors were from developing countries or "weak institutions." However, publishing papers from such regions is not a violation of Scopus's criteria. In fact, *Nurture* published papers from 35 countries across different developed and developing countries. The criticism seems based on bias, not facts.

5.2. Misunderstanding Journal Scope

CSAB said that *Nurture* was publishing "finance and management" papers unrelated to its name. However, the journal's declared scope includes social policy, education, and economics—fields that overlap with business and finance, especially when the focus is on social impact.

5.3. Questioning Institutional Origin

CSAB found it "strange" that many Chinese authors were publishing from Thailand. This is a global trend, and such a comment reflects prejudice, not a sound academic evaluation.

6. LACK OF TRANSPARENCY IN SCOPUS REVIEW PROCESS

Over 45 formal emails were sent by *Nurture* asking for explanations. No explanation was received from Scopus team members. We have dispatched emails to the following recipients ([CSAB](#)).

- Professor & Chairman Jörg-Rüdiger Sack.
- Professor Patrick A. Palmieri.
- Professor Michael Neal Lehman.
- Professor David Rew.
- Professor Donald Dingwell.
- Professor David Nelken.
- Professor Richard Whatmore.

- Professor Peter Brimblecombe.
- Professor Mara G. Freire.
- Professor Ashok Raina.
- Professor Chris van Kessel.
- Professor Peter Miller.
- Professor Jaya Raju.
- Professor Manolis Papadrakakis.
- Professor Jo Angouri.

There is no clear, fair appeal process. Scopus claims to follow advice from the CSAB but can also make changes without prior notice.

To come to a decision to accept or reject a title for Scopus, Elsevier follows the independent advice from the CSAB. Elsevier, in consultation with the CSAB, reserves the right to change decisions, adjust the selection criteria, halt, remove, or re-evaluate titles that are accepted for Scopus without prior notice.

Source: <https://www.elsevier.com/products/scopus/content/content-policy-and-selection>

This goes against their own ethical guidelines and violates principles of transparency and accountability.

7. QUESTIONS ABOUT CSAB QUALIFICATIONS

[Professor Julie J. Li](#), [CSAB](#) Subject Chair – Business, Management & Accounting; Economics, Econometrics & Finance, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.

The appointment of Professor Julie J. Li as the Chair of the Scopus Content Selection and Advisory Board (CSAB) for Business, Management & Accounting; Economics, Econometrics & Finance raises several concerns regarding disciplinary alignment, academic contribution, and the principles of equitable scholarly evaluation.

- It has been reported that Professor Li has made dismissive remarks concerning research output from "weaker institutions" or "Weak editorial board members." Such statements, if verified, undermine the values of inclusivity and academic fairness that global indexing services like Scopus are expected to uphold. They risk reinforcing selective biases and discouraging scholarly contributions from emerging and under-resourced academic environments.
- While Professor Li's expertise lies primarily in marketing and retail services—subfields of business management—her role as CSAB Chair also covers the distinct and methodologically rigorous domains of Economics, Econometrics, and Finance. These disciplines often demand deep engagement with theoretical modeling, quantitative methods, and complex empirical analyses. Her publication record, according to Scopus, includes 41 indexed papers. Notably, she is the first author on only three of these, with the remainder listing her primarily as a second, third, or final author. In many academic disciplines, first authorship is associated with primary responsibility for the research's conceptual and methodological framework. By contrast, middle or last authorship is often linked to more marginal roles.
- Although it is important to acknowledge that contribution norms vary by field, the limited number of first-authored publications in theoretically and methodologically intensive domains calls into question the depth of Professor Li's expertise in areas central to her CSAB Chair responsibilities. Given this, her selection for such a pivotal role in evaluating journal quality and inclusion criteria across a wide swath of economically technical disciplines appears misaligned.
- Academic indexing services bear a profound responsibility in maintaining transparency, methodological rigor, and subject-specific competence in their evaluation processes. To ensure trust and credibility, appointments to decision-making roles should be closely aligned with demonstrable expertise across all relevant subject areas—not just one subfield.

[Professor Henry Wai-chung Yeung](#), [CSAB](#) Subject Chair – Social Sciences; Education, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.

- Professor Henry Wai-chung Yeung is a highly respected academic in the field of Geography and Resource Management. With a distinguished Ph.D. in Geography and a strong research portfolio focusing on economic geography, regional development, and global production networks, his expertise is widely recognized within his discipline.
- However, concerns arise regarding his appointment as the CSAB (Content Selection & Advisory Board) Subject Chair for the broad domain of *Social Sciences; Education*, particularly under the framework of Scopus journal evaluation. While Geography is often considered a part of the social sciences, it is important to acknowledge that the fields of Education and many areas within the broader *Social Sciences* (such as sociology, psychology, educational theory, pedagogy, and curriculum studies) require specialized disciplinary knowledge distinct from geography or resource management.
- The role of a CSAB Subject Chair involves making crucial decisions about journal inclusion, delisting, and quality standards, which deeply impact the scholarly publishing landscape. These decisions must be grounded in deep disciplinary understanding, including awareness of current theoretical debates, methodological standards, and publication practices within each specific sub-field.
- The key criticism, therefore, is whether it is appropriate or justifiable for a scholar whose primary expertise lies outside the core areas of education and many branches of social sciences to oversee and influence evaluations in these fields. This raises valid concerns about the credibility, transparency, and fairness of Scopus's journal evaluation process. Decisions made without adequate disciplinary insight risk misjudging the scholarly value and editorial practices of journals, particularly those in highly specialized or interdisciplinary domains.
- To maintain trust and integrity in academic indexing systems like Scopus, it is essential that subject chair roles are assigned based on clear alignment between academic expertise and disciplinary scope. While Professor Yeung's scholarly credentials are beyond question within his field, his current appointment to oversee Social Sciences and Education evaluations warrants critical re-examination. This is particularly important to ensure that subject-specific standards are upheld, and that the journal evaluation process remains fair, informed, and transparent.

These facts raise doubts about whether these chairs had the expertise or neutrality required for such a serious final evaluation. It is also important to examine whether other subject chairs have qualifications and research backgrounds that align with their assigned fields and responsibilities.

8. IMPACT ON JOURNALS FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

This case is part of a bigger problem. Journals from developing countries often face bias and unfair treatment. Many serve as important platforms for researchers in less-represented regions. If decisions are based on subjective views instead of facts, the entire indexing system becomes unreliable.

9. PERSONAL EDITORIAL EXPERIENCE DURING PERFORM DUTIES

We have received numerous requests for special issue publications from consultants in China, Malaysia, Ukraine and India. When we decline to publish special issues of their low-quality papers, they threaten to file complaints with Scopus, citing concerns about the publication standards of our journal. The consultants claim to hold director-level positions in public universities and assert that they will formally complain to Scopus, which could result in our journal being delisted. The Scopus also entertains official complaints and takes them seriously, as outlined in the revaluation policies.

Title re-evaluation policy

The quality of our content is paramount for Scopus. In addition to journals undergoing a rigorous evaluation and selection processes prior to acceptance into Scopus, they must also demonstrate the ability to maintain their quality status year over year.

To determine journal quality, Scopus runs an ongoing Re-evaluation program, which identifies outlier and underperforming journals in four different ways:

1. The journal is **underperforming** as it does not meet any of the three metrics and benchmarks for journals in the same subject area
2. **Concerns about the publication standards** of the journal or publisher have been raised by formal complaints
3. The journal shows **outlier behavior** based on its publishing performance in Scopus
4. **Continuous curation** based on CSAB feedback

No. 1


Prof. Wong Ming WONG, Associate Dean of Academic Development and Director of the Business Administration program at the International College, Krirk University, Thailand, requested a special issue. We have declined his request. He has threatened to file a complaint with Scopus.

Ask for a partnership

External

Inbox x

Summarize this email



WM Wong <wong.ming@staff.krirk.ac.th>
to me

☆

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⋮

Dear Editor,

Good day! We got your email from my colleague. We organize the International Conference on Sustainable Management twice a year and one time for a paper development workshop. We are looking for a partner to develop our academic researches and activities. Our university is the 149th of QS ranking in Asia this year. Thus, we hope to co-operate to work with you, such as the paper development workshop, a special issue from your journal, or our international conference.


Thanks,

Regards,
Wong Ming WONG
Associate Dean of Academic Development
Director of the Business Adm.
International College, Krirk University, Thailand
<https://www.krirk.ac.th/en/>
The 5th International Conference on Sustainable Management 2022 Dec 18 to 19
<https://easychair.org/cfp/5thICSM2022>

No. 2

Request for Special Issues External Info

Summarize this email

**Siti Sarah Maidin Prof. Ts. Dr.** <sitisarah.maidin@newinti.edu.my>
to info@nurture.org.pk

Dear Prof./Dr./Mr./Ms.,
I hope this message finds you well. My name is Siti Sarah Maidin, and I am the Head of Programme at INTI International University. I am reaching out to propose the creation of a series of special issues on Computing Innovations and Information Systems: Driving Multidisciplinary Research and Intervention Strategies, which I believe will significantly contribute to the field of Computing and multidisciplinary research. The special issues will cover a range of subjects within the broader theme of Computing Innovations and Information Systems such as Technological Advancements in Computing and Information Systems, AI and Machine Learning Interventions, Data Analytics and Big Data Applications, Blockchain and Security, Cloud Computing and IoT, Computing on Education and Learning Technologies and Interdisciplinary and Cross-Sectoral Interventions. We anticipate including contributions that feature research articles, case studies, interviews, etc.

I propose to lead the special issues, bringing my experience as Editorial board member. I also plan to assemble a team of experts in computing and multidisciplinary research to ensure a rigorous peer review process and high-quality contributions. I invited my team members AP. Dr. Malathy and AP. Dr. Deshinta as the guest editor based on their experience as the editorial board member. We are prepared to adhere to a timeline that aligns with editorial calendar. I am keen to discuss this proposal further and explore how we can collaborate on this exciting project. Please let me know your thoughts and if there are any additional information or details you require.
Thank you for considering this proposal. I look forward to the possibility of working together on this venture.

Regards,
Siti Sarah

We declined this no.2 request for the special issue and not communicate further.

No. 3

Kateryna Statsyk <catherine3092@ukr.net>
to me, info, z.burik

We are Ukrainian scientists, and we are very interested in having a special issue published in your journal either in January or February.

1. Could you please inform us if you publish special issues, and if so, what are the publication conditions?
2. What is the final deadline for submitting articles?
3. How many articles are typically included in a special issue?

Thank you very much for your response!
Best regards,
Kateryna Statsyk.

After the journal declined a no.3 request for a special issue from Ukrainian professor Kateryna Statsyk, it was communicated that *Nurture* would be delisted from Scopus within two months. Professor Statsyk indicated that she would file an official complaint with Scopus, questioning the journal's quality standards.

A demanding question remains unanswered: How does Scopus act on unverified complaints, especially when they originate from individuals holding high-level (Director/HOD) positions in public universities?

10. CONCLUSION

The delisting of *Nurture* from Scopus reveals serious weaknesses in how academic journals are evaluated and removed from indexing. Although Scopus claims to follow a structured and fair re-evaluation process, the actions taken in this case clearly did not align with their own published rules. The comments made by reviewers included unethical, racially insensitive, and biased language, which is unacceptable from a global indexing body. Furthermore, Scopus failed to offer detailed feedback or a transparent explanation to the editorial team of *Nurture*, leaving them without a meaningful opportunity to respond or appeal. This lack of clarity and fairness raises serious questions about the legitimacy of the decision.

Another major concern is the qualifications of the subject chairs involved. In this case, the subject chairs evaluating *Nurture* did not have appropriate expertise in the journal's field. Their decisions appeared to ignore objective data such as the diversity of contributing authors, the quality of articles, and citation performance. Instead, the review relied heavily on subjective opinions and personal biases, particularly against authors and editors from developing

countries (China and Russia). If indexing platforms like Scopus allow such unchecked authority and vague reasoning to guide decisions, it risks turning academic evaluation into an unfair and opaque process—one where journals from less developed regions are especially vulnerable.

This article is not just a defense of *Nurture*, but a call for change. If Scopus and other indexing services truly value academic fairness, they must adopt transparent, unbiased, and objective evaluation standards. Reviewers must be matched with appropriate subject expertise, and appeals should be handled openly and respectfully. Most importantly, journals from developing regions should not be treated as lesser or suspicious by default. The case of *Nurture* is a warning to the global academic community: if we do not demand fairness and accountability from powerful indexing agencies, we risk losing the very principles of equity and diversity that scholarly publishing should uphold.

Scopus is an indexing database that tracks citations and calculates the CiteScore of journals. Journals that do not receive citations and consistently have a CiteScore of zero are not contributing meaningfully to the academic community. Therefore, it is recommended that such journals be delisted from Scopus to maintain the quality and relevance of the indexed content.

References

Elsevier Scopus Content Policy and Selection Guidelines. <https://www.elsevier.com/products/scopus/content/content-policy-and-selection>
CiteScore Metrics for *Nurture*, Scopus Source ID: 21100236616. [Scopus Source Record](#)

Note: ChatGPT was utilized to refine, clarify, and enhance the English language and overall readability of this document.