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Hurdles for Journal Publications

Opinion Paper

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Abstract

Teachers, students, and researchers regularly publish their research materials in various journals for academic excellence and overall research progress, especially in the university. In addition to the research facilities of an organization, the quality of the article also depends on the quality of its researcher or article writer. On the other hand, there are thousands of journals in the world in terms of quantity and quality. The quality of journals (e.g., rank, impact factor), guidelines, submission, review and publication processes, article processing charge (APC), scopes, editorial and review board oversight also harm the researcher and their research activities and publication, thereby, overall, the progress of research in the world. This article highlights the undesirable and unresolved outcomes of journal publication. The most common complications are related to the type and quality of the journals, journal selection and article transfer services, intricacy in article submission, review and publication processes, complexity in linguistic, referencing, plagiarism and charges (including APC), biased attitudes of the journal, impact complications, and copyright permission rules. The above problems can be properly addressed by a combination of journals, journal regulatory agencies, research institutes, and researchers.

Keywords: Articles, journals, higher education, publication difficulty

1. Introduction

Article publication in journals is a daily affair for researchers, especially university teachers and students (Siler et al., 2018). A single research paper is a solution to one or more problems, a collection of information, and a guide to the future. There is no substitute for research to ensure the growth, equitable distribution, and well-planned use of a country's resources. Although a researcher researches his own needs or his mental satisfaction, the results of the research still provide the above benefits. Research activities are usually university-centric (Zhou et al., 2016). Most universities in developed countries focus on research activities. On the other hand, most universities in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are not research-oriented. University students, teachers, and/or researchers who regularly conduct research and publish in impacted journals can easily avail the benefits of various domestic and foreign funds. It is also advisable to have institutional credentials and research facilities to obtain funds.

However, in LMICs, most teachers write a research paper for promotional issues in their job sectors and students do it to complete the course according to the syllabus. A limited number of teachers/researchers research due to they have a keen interest in research activities. Alternatively, some students pursue research in pursuit of higher education (e.g., Ph.D., post-doctoral), although their numbers are negligible (Roach, 2017).

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There are thousands of journals in the world for research publications with a difference in branch-wise values, impact factor, and ranking. Some journals have Subscription and Open or Gold open choice options. This means that the accepted articles can be published for free and/or with money. The common denominator between Open or Gold open choice is that in both cases the published article can be downloaded and read by the readers/researchers around the world without payment, and the difference is that in Gold open choice, the article is displayed on the journal site immediately after the acceptance, therefore the authors need to pay some extra article processing charge (APC) than the 'open' choice option of a particular journal. Some journals have only Subscription mode, which means the researchers don't have to pay to publish accepted articles, and the readers can download and read articles without paying, however, the number of such journals is negligible. These two categories of journals are Scopus and/or ISI (Institute for Scientific Information) ranking and have JCR (Journal Citation Report) impact factor. However, outside of these, the number of journals is not less in the world. Again, many journals are new and are yet to get an ISSN (International Standard Serial Number). Many journals receive ISSN numbers within a few months to a few years of the first release of publications. On the other hand, many journals close after releasing a few issues or even change the name.

The quality of a research publication usually depends on the researcher, research institute, research facilities along the writing quality of the authors. However, journals are different in their quality and value. Therefore, the rank, impact factor, guidelines, submission and review process of journals along with their APC values, editorial and review board activities also harm overall research activities, as they can have a direct and indirect negative impact on the researchers or their research activities and publications. This article highlights the unwanted and undesirable complications for journal publication aiming to find the right solution to the problems with the combination of appropriate means and the path of research becomes simpler.

2. Journal Type and Quality

In addition to the quality, rank, type, and scope of journals, various issues affect quality publications (Graf et al., 2007).

2.1. Poor Quality Journals

Sadly, there has been a flurry of business in journalism lately. Such journals rarely produce quality publications, and in addition to a limited amount of money, they publish articles without peer reviews in just a few days. They even publish articles outside their scope effortlessly. By setting the impact factor controversially and differently, they reach to the researchers, retrieve the researchers' email addresses, and ask for articles by saying that they are short of an article for their upcoming issue. They even showed the temptation to relax the APC and other relevant charges. Such journals publish a large number of articles per year. Many of them claim their journals as 'Peer Review', although they are not. In most cases, these types of journals are named after the well-known impacted journals, which confuses many researchers. Researchers, including university teachers and students from the LMICs, can do with this category publications, but for the researchers from the developed or rich countries publishing in such journals is not only a sign of wasting time and money but also reducing the face value of them. These do not improve their quality or achieve anything in their professional life. Many quality research materials fall into the clutches of such journals because once an article is published, no matter how valuable it is, it can no longer be published in another journal. On the other hand, publishing in such a journal reduces the number of quality readers as well as the number and quality of authors' citations.

2.2. Quality Journals

Impacted journals, on the other hand, are no less complex. Many journals take a long time (a few months to more than a year) from article submission to give their first decision or reviewers' report. Some journals reject articles after a long time with or without showing valid reasons. As a result, a class of researchers (e.g., Masters and Ph.D. students) fall in danger as they need to show the

acceptance letter and/or publication evidence for the qualification or defense of their project/thesis; teachers and researchers are also stuck in the promotion. Moreover, researchers need to show publication evidence to their research funding agencies on time. This is a strong reason for researchers to break the policy regarding article submission or withdrawal. However, one of the reasons why journals are late in giving review reports is not getting timely reports from the reviewers. It is better not to delay the publication of quality articles in scientific journals because it delays providing the right solution in time, especially those journals that publish papers on medicines or diseases. Although research is a universal subject, however, special care should be taken in publishing articles from non-relevant researchers, even from a well-known or potential researcher in any journal. The current pandemic (coronavirus disease 2019 or Covid-19) is an excellent example of infodemic issues.

3. Towards the Final Publication

3.1. Journal Selection

Publication of a research paper in an appropriate journal is a matter of utmost importance as it is also imperative for researchers to make field-specific publications. That is, researchers should publish in standard journals based on their work experience and professional demands, unless they might fall behind in their professional and institutional evaluation. Despite the high impact factor of published journals, the journal's quality is unable to raise credit as per the demand in its area, and even no credit is likely to be matched. Researchers usually select the appropriate journals for their articles through their own experience, expert advice, and going through publisher services. The various 'Journal finders' or 'Journal suggester' systems (e.g., Weily journal finder, Springer journal suggester, Elsevier journal finder) approved by the publishers also often do not suggest suitable journals according to the article types and contents. On the other hand, journals that have an 'Article transfer service' (when an article is rejected in a journal, the same publisher suggests some other possible journals under it) are not very effective. Therefore, these approaches need to be further improved. In addition to paying attention to rational or reasonable publications (quality articles according to journal scope and timely publication), the highest respect should be shown to researchers, research work, and research institutes, such as – (i) not only rejecting a standardized research paper for falling behind in ratings but also considering it in a later issue or recommending it to a suitable journal that may accept it; (ii) providing advice on the rejected articles through an experienced advisory committee for further improvement; (iii) assist in the development of short and possibly free article language editing service for non-native speaker researchers, etc.

3.2. Article submission

The first contact with the researcher and a journal of research work is through article submission. Most low-quality journals allow article submission via direct emailing to the editor, although this is a simpler approach, but involves significant complications such as word-joining throughout the article. On the other hand, the submission process of many journals is quite complex; authors need to complete multiple steps which are time-consuming and these require much unnecessary information besides the required information for an article.

3.3. Review process

Reviewer suggestion, in the journal's submission system, is another important issue. Author(s) suggests reviewers of their choice who are close to them, which in turn raises some unwanted issues, including personal contacts, promotional tools, and even monetary transactions. In most cases, the authors suggest reviewers in different research areas. In this case, the journals can set up their experienced reviewer panel and provide them with various facilities, such as – (i) attach their names in special places in the published article and give valuable status to the scientific community; (ii) honorarium from the publication APC values; (iii) certificates of review experience that may be useful in their professional life, etc. The unfortunate but true fact is that some reviewers report in very harsh language which has the effect of losing research interest, especially for the new and emerging researchers. Even some reviewers give different opinions for not accepting articles, dragging out

irrelevant issues, such as citing their articles, force to rework in labs (although they don't know if researchers have that kind of lab facility), etc. Journals should avoid such reviewers on their initiative and their irrelevant comments should also be removed from the review forum. Peer review journal editors should not only submit an 'acceptance' or 'rejection' notice of an article based on the opinion of the reviewers but also submit a comprehensive, reasonable and fruitful review report to the authors after observing the opinions.

3.4. Publication process

The process of publishing low-quality journals is fast, as most of them do not follow the peer review process properly or even at all. In this way, researchers do not have the opportunity to resolve shortcomings related to their research and serious mistakes in the published articles. Moreover, the galley proofs were given by them, and also the final published papers contain many mistakes. On the other hand, many quality journals take quite a long time (weeks to months) from acceptance to final publication. However, all types of journals should be given at least one chance (a few hours to a few days) to their authors for a further correction after receiving the revised galley proofs provided by them. In this way, it will be possible to remove the final stage complications (e.g., corrigendum) related to the publication.

4. Other Key Issues for Consideration

4.1. Linguistic complexity

The language of a good article should be clear and understandable. This does not mean that complex words or sentences have to be used. As a result, readers, especially non-native readers, lose interest in reading the article. Many well-known researchers around the world use complex words or phrases in their articles. The point is that it takes a few minutes to understand the meaning of a single sentence. Many reputed journals appreciate their author to use such kind of language. English non-native researchers have to deal with additional stress in publishing their research materials in impacted journals. Most of the journals submit such a report that the language of the article is not correct even the linguistic errors or complexities in a limited number of words or sentences in an article. Many journals reject articles for linguistic complexity. And in this way, many personal and institutional business linguists or writers are being born. In my opinion, linguistic barriers in scientific production should be removed. It is also seen that some journals do some kind of business with language correction facility services which are also very important to eliminate. Research is not a grammar practice in a particular language, but an activity engaged in human welfare. Moreover, there is no need for the researcher, especially the article writer, to be experienced or expert in English!

4.2. Referencing

Each journal has its unique reference writing style, although I don't understand the meaning of this difference. All that is required to be in a reference is to be provided correctly! What is the need to complicate it? Researchers do not suffer less in reference management in repeatedly rejected articles. In my opinion, after the acceptance, that is, before the final publication, there should be relaxed reference writing. Because if the article doesn't get accepted, then what is the benefit of managing the reference according to the journal guidelines? If rejected, it can be submitted to another journal. Moreover, it does not affect reviewing the article and submitting the review report to the author(s). After all, it is not at all difficult for a researcher to manage references to any article according to the journal guidelines before the final publication! The process of referencing should not be complicated by urging journals to be unique. Even the numbering method is not convenient in the reference system, as it takes away the valuable time of researchers by adding or subtracting new information in the case of articles with more references.

4.3. Plagiarism

At present, there is no end to the headaches of journals and researchers with plagiarism (Jereb et al., 2018). To date, some software (e.g., iThenticate, Turnitin, Copykiller, Dupli checker, Copyleaks, PlagTracker, PlagScan, etc.) have been developed to detect plagiarism in research materials. Most

software identifies one to three words in a row, even chemicals or drugs or the name of a disease. Scientific articles contain special parts (such as materials and methods) that are used by researchers in the same type of research in which even the slightest change in approach can lead to many complications and even ruin the whole study. Therefore, researchers are forced to use them intact in their projects and thesis papers or articles. Paraphrasing often deviates from the basics. Moreover, if we work in the same way, thousands of researchers will not be able to express the subject in a thousand different ways by paraphrasing! Using a limited number of words or phrases from a publication if its reference is given correctly, then there is no point in creating so much complication with plagiarism. In my opinion, the main issue of plagiarism should be to reduce the complexity of data theft.

Let's discuss this crucial fact. Many good researchers in the world are not good writers. Research indeed needs to be published and disseminated in a specific language to be universal. This is because the English language is international. But it is also true that one language can never be fully or properly expressed in another language. We want the result of every research. So how reasonable is it for researchers to suppress English language skills by trapping them in native/non-native language? Researchers should write their research papers without fear, only if they can understand the subject well! Thousands of people can present the same subject in different ways, and thousands of people can present the same subject in the same way too. Even, a person can do the same thing without seeing it. What kind of security do we want as a researcher? Do we know that no one else in the world is doing what I am doing at the moment? As such, even the question of plagiarism is not limited to key issues, such as data, images, figures, diagrams, and so on. To me - the research should not be deprived at all by dragging the subject into a limited number of words or sentences. Moreover, when a researcher does proofread with an outside English expert, what is the security of his research findings? If a non-native researcher goes to a native for writing, proofreading his article, then the full credit for his publication will surely not go to that researcher alone! We borrow or buy a lot of things from different countries or individuals to complete our research activities, such as- chemicals, reagents, machines, equipment, software, etc. So, what about them? A researcher should feel honored if anyone uses his/her words, sentences, or even paragraphs in other papers. Even a researcher may not have the power of speech or the hand of writing!

The subject of 'novelty' does not depend on the wording or sentencing of any article but on the key findings of that research. Researchers who do research or publish very limited will either be able to write their articles in the form of novel phrases or sentences over time. But how do those who do research on a specific line and do multiple publications a year write the same methods used in research over and over again with novel phrases or sentences? How many times will they modify an established method? Wouldn't this approach cause problems with the results of their research? Besides, they will repeat the same topics in writing discussion sections. Because that's how they can be better expressed. In real sense, many things are not going to be presented well in the context of this plagiarism policy. Because when we write to them, the similarity index sits. 'I am a researcher'. If it holds similarity, how many ways we can write it? Moreover, what is there making this simple sentence difficult or complicated by repeatedly throwing it into the net of novelty? Doesn't it reduce the quality of the article?

4.4. Charges

There needs to be a clear policy for the APC setting of the journals. Many low-quality journals are evident to assign high APC values. APC complexity of good quality journals forces many researchers to publish quality articles in low-quality journals which in addition to degrading the quality publication of their research materials, thereby, affecting the progress of research on the particular subject. Some journals limit the number of pages with articles and charge extra for the additional pages, while some charge for drawing or improvement of figures. Both harm the poor and novice researchers.

4.5. Biased attitude

It is unwelcomed but true–publishing in impacted journals is more difficult for the new faces, irregular, unfamiliar or lesser-known and low-quality research institutes (e.g., universities, research institutions) and the researchers from there. It seems that such journals are looking only for the branded researchers and well-known (reputed) organizations. As a result, the researchers from the poorly-known institutions may lag behind in research, as it is one of the major consequences for the loss of research interest. However, the journals cannot detect any correspondents or researchers who are new or inexperienced. Thus, many researchers suffer from article handling and submission fears due to the biased attitude of the journal editorial board. When the same article is rejected from several journals, the research team of that article, apart from the correspondent, suffers from an inferiority complex and turns away from the research activities. It is also one of the major consequences of the irrational publication of many research items. Many times, such researchers take the help of reputed researchers from different organizations and even from different countries, although it plays a significant role in the development of the research activities or research papers, many researchers have snatched authorship without significant contributions, which is an unethical practice in journal publishing (González-Alcaide et al., 2017).

4.6. Impact complications

The quality of writing and presentation of articles, low similarity index or novelty in writing and the tendency to look for branded researchers and institutions are lagging far behind the research activities by the impacted journals. For example - if one studies the specific medicinal properties of two medicinal plants and the results of the first plant are much better than that of the second one in comparison to a standard; even the results section presents both nice, but if the other sections are not so good in the case of the first article or the above issues are introduced then the acceptance rate of the second article will increase. The question may be - where is the problem? Suppose the researcher publishes the first article in a non-impacted journal despite getting good results. Accordingly, the number of sites will decrease along with the number of readers. Reputed researchers or research funding institutions do not usually revolve around such journals. As a result, this medicinal plant might be neglected for a long time.

On the other hand, even though the second article was published in the impacted journal, since the quality of the medicinal plant was not good, it will not go much further; this will increase the cost of overall research. In my opinion, the research papers in the impacted journals should pay special attention to the results. Quality writing or presentation, low similarity index, or novelty in writing is required for quality publication, but it should not be taken away from the main purpose of the research or the researchers. A good researcher and a good writer or a good English linguist is not the same thing. In the same way, getting good research results is not the same thing as impacted articles. Such journals can select their editorial and review boards in such a way that they do not reject low-quality written research papers based on good results at all, but guide them to the authors and publish them well. It will accurately evaluate the researcher and research.

4.7. Copyright permission

We should have open copyright permission on such a serious matter for the sake of research excellence. The word 'Research' consists of 'Re' and 'Search', which also mean *de novo* search. As such, it is doubtful how much of the research the novel is! Because what a researcher reported for the first time was also on the earth. Researchers just use energy differently to give a different look and solve one or more problems. But do we know that this will not cause more problems in the future? No researcher should be proud of his research credentials because that too is the gift of the only almighty Allah. So how does a researcher get the point of being proud of his research? After all, research is a rolling stone and we should not interrupt it at all.

5. Conclusion

To properly address the above problems, it is necessary to take groundbreaking steps immediately under the supervision of journals and journal approval agencies along with the researchers and research institutes. Otherwise, the problems may become more pronounced and create other complications. Naturally, a journal will not be able to target all classes of readers and it will not be open to all. However, journals should take special care and necessary precautions regarding their target readers, researchers, and research. A special goal of any journal should be to not only improve the quality of the journal by publishing good quality articles but also to expedite the research activities. This will increase the enthusiasm of the researchers towards research activities and also increase the chance of getting the correct solution to a particular problem in time.

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