

Open Forum

A Peep into Academics, Research and Research Publications

A specific feature entitled as OPEN FORUM was introduced some time back with the hope that the teachers, researchers, students, publishers, and the research managers would response but unfortunately no response was received so far. Perhaps no body has time to focus on such issues. A few developments in academic sphere have taken place which affect the academicians which I would like to share here with the earnest hope to get the response in the OPEN FORUM.

Need of Publication

Publication of a research paper is the normal route for the dissemination of knowledge. So, for a researcher or teacher publication is a part of duty and is a yardstick of measurement of performance. Earlier the research findings were used to be presented before the learned societies where there used be debate and then when the findings were accepted, were used to be the proceedings of committee. The basic purpose of writing a review was to bring out the research work done at one plate form and know what has been lacking and in which way the future research should go. A research not published becomes redundant as it is not exposed to the peers and is refereed to or cited. In review process, in good journals the peers review the research work or review and are thus, evaluated before it goes to the publication. Thus, it is normal activity of the scientist or a teacher. In any institute, there are people with excellent abilities, average abilities and poor abilities. If it is mandatory to publish papers in the journals of high impact factor, how the quality of concerned scientist van be judged or differentiated as all have published in the journals of high impact? Why not the evaluating committee could judge the quality of the paper rather than its impact factor? A paper can be split into 2-3 small papers to increase the number or can be a single paper of all the details. Thus, the concept of number becomes absolute.

These days publication of paper has become essential to get the degree like M.Phil or Ph.D., apparently to improve the quality of research for the award of degree. While it is a good idea it also compels the students to publish the paper using the means at his or her disposal including the publication in the paid journals. Where is the quality then? The idea of publications for the award of degree is more prevalent where it is completely research based. Where the PhD. Degree is by partial fulfillment how one can do the research of high quality in one and half year and then, publish in journal of high impact journal. The answer to these questions needs to be given by academia.

Many journals of high impact also charge very high fees which some students barring those coming on paid seats, can pay. Of course, the publication of a large numbers of papers has given a large numbers of papers to the publishers and has increased the numbers of journals and subsequently, the publishers. Some of the publishers only aim to get a large numbers of papers and even skip the editorial review process. Otherwise, how could a paper be published in just a month or week? A point to ponder upon? The regulatory agencies should consider such points, while evaluating the journals.

These days, focus is on the publications of the results in the high impact factor journals. It means that the research should be of same standards as that of Oxford university, Yale university, MITS, BITS, IITs etc.. One can understand that the prestigious institutes with large infrastructure and capability can produce these results. In many cases, this has been made as the basis for promotion to next level or even for the yearly appraisal. In any institution, there are many people with average intelligence or research capability or those doing teaching are not pure researchers or do not have facility of that level where would they go? When institute is opened in specific area like the ICAR institutes, it does research for the areas where they work, for the sake of growth of general people of the area, how their research then can be published in so prestigious journals with high impact factor. Moreover, their research is of regional importance so cannot be published in the journal with international standing? Even the departmental promotions have been made like so. No body is seeing the utility of the papers and the impact that would make on the society which should be basic thing while evaluating the performance of an individual.

Journals For publication

We have a large number of journals many dealing with very specific aspects so the results of research are very much focused and receive the right audience. At the same time question arises, is there any regulatory mechanism to regulate the name of the journal? The journals are named like *Journal of biotechnology, biotechnology research journal, International journal of biotechnology, so on and so forth. Similarly, there are many journal like food and Nutrition, Nutrition and food Science., Journal of microbiology, International journal of Microbiology research, Microbiological research* etc. It is agreed that there can be different journals with same subject, even can be on the similar subjects but their coverage should be different, style of papers presentation should also be different, with different focus It can easily be achieved with some sort of registry at national and international level. Naturally, when the coverage is such that the findings are of implications at international level it should be named international otherwise would remain national only.

Screening of Journals

As a right approach, the journals should be screened if there is any journal with the same name existing in a particular country ?Such screening should be both at the national and international level. If any journal is already existing it should not be allowed to register and allowed to publish. But the committee or better a commission constituted for this purpose should have persons of proven scientific integrity, not the persons recommended on other consideration than academics. The members should be from all the members countries. These should have separate committees for different subjects. They should meet regularly to discuss the issues. The publisher however, through the editor should be given opportunity to explain and defend the same.

A screening of the journal and regulation of the journal would be of great help in improving the quality of publication. This approach would help the publication of quality papers, research and finally the quality of scientist and teachers. It can also stabilize the journals who are after the papers and many are on the brink of closure. At present, they are running because of the need for award of degree and for promotion to the higher posts. The vicious circles need to be broken.

Type of papers and publication, impact factor

When the research work is of high standard, automatically the publication would be of high standards. Naturally, the journals where such results are published would be of high impact factor. But publications need not to be always in the high impact journals but should be submitted depending upon the quality of research conducted. For example those with the findings of international standard should go to the journals of high impact. Those of medium research can be published in the national journals which are peer reviewed.

Publication fees

Should there any fees for publication of a paper? Science is a pious thing and should never be allowed to be weighed with money. Now if they charge money, it is called predatory journal if not who will bear the cost of production, being discussed separately in the next para. In earlier times, the papers publication was free but many times they would charge the cost of reprint but providing tear sheets for the contributors. Now, some journal charge fees. But the fees are charged after the papers are refereed and are accepted.

The publications in the journal with high impact have basically the problem of payment. Many of these journals have very high publication fee. For a normal scientist with the normal pay, it is more than difficult to pay the fees. These fees in the form of dollar, for example the fee is many times of the order of 400-1000/- dollars which when multiplied by the values in ₹ say 60/-becomes 24, 000 - 60,000/- who can pay this fee from the pocket? The academia needs to answer. It is all the more relevant when ACR, promotion, selection etc are related with this. We need to find out a suitable answer.

Availability of literature

In my opinion, in conducting the research of high order, the basic is the availability of literature. Though many journals are open access but there are many where there is need for the pass word after paying the required fee. So this becomes, quite difficult to know even the status of research being conducted on a particular aspect. How to know the research gaps? Only after you get the research gaps you can plan the research. This issue also calls for consideration.

An easy solution is being practiced by several institutes. These institutions have subscribed some journals of a particular publisher such as Elsevier, Springer, CRC, Science direct or similar other publisher so that the institutes have access to the journals. Publications in such journals would not have any problem. It can be very useful so as to publish review papers in the journals of very high impact, especially when there is scanty of research infrastructure.

Time of publication

It is equally heartening to note that the publication of the papers has become very rapid compared to the earlier times when it used to take almost a year to publish a paper. Rather these days the publication time is reduced to beyond ones imagination time, say two weeks. The question arises if this has really improved the quality of the research papers or for that matter the overall quality of the research. Perhaps the answer is certainly not yes if not a blanket no. The biggest problem comes with some journals when they advertise that the paper would be evaluated in weeks time and published in a period of say two

weeks. It is not understood how the paper is evaluated in a week, or got revised in two weeks and then, published. I could not imagine how a prestigious and renowned referee who can evaluate the paper say in a week and the same is revised in a weeks time and published. Are the referees and the editors so competent or free or it is assumed that everything is ok.

Predatory vs Non-predatory Journals

The journals which normally publish the papers without review or by passing the peers fall under the category of predatory journals, as they hunt for the papers so as to earn fees. There are several journals now which publish the paper to earn money. The others are non-predatory as they get the papers, evaluate the same and if accepted by the peers get revised and then, publish the same. There is a need of some sort of regulations which could differentiate the predatory journal from the non-predatory. It can easily be done from the call of the paper they give, promise to publish the same and seeing the quality of paper. Acceptance or rejection rate of the papers can also easily reflect the quality.

Publication fees, problem of researchers and compulsions of publisher

Interestingly as written earlier, a large number of the journals have prescribed publication fees while a few have some consideration for the economic status of the researcher. There are some journals who ask for the fees after the review is conducted and the paper is recommended for publication like this journal. To some extent, from academic point of view, this approach is appropriate. What about those who do not have enough fees to pay? The question arises why there is publication fees? The answer is simple when the libraries do not subscribe the journals who will fund the publisher for the publication cost. The libraries do not subscribe the journals due to several reasons like lack of funds or diversion of funds for computerization so on and so forth. To cite, digital subscription has become the need of most of the libraries so they opt for the same. Thus, the paucity of the funds and stress for the computerization, have contributed to this phenomenon. So what is the solution?

Publication Ethics

Many authors submit paper to several journals and where it is accepted early is selected for the publication. The journals of repute screen the papers and get reviewed from competent referees and then get it revised and only then publish. Naturally time is consumed. In such case the author reply the paper is withdrawn and published elsewhere. Another issue of relevance is that the researchers submit their papers to a journal. If the same is extensively edited and made suitable for publication, it is published in some other journal. The journal that did a lot of efforts is denied the paper. What policy is appropriate for such authors which do such practices. Black listing would not help the publisher or the editor as their efforts are wasted? What solution could be there?

Consequences of present trend

The academicians and all those involved in domain of education and research should think if a person is not having money will he not have any publication? While business community even in the education domain would enjoy the privilege of high quality publication, the person without money would lag behind. This is something which is indigestible to hard core academicians.

Present thinking in the world

According to an article by Brian Resnick, on September 24, 2018, Europe has a plan to force academic publishers to make research free to read. It costs a fortune to read scientific research. Pressure is mounting for that to change. It has been argued that the *universities spend millions every year on academic journal subscriptions for their students and faculty. And while these costs may be manageable for some, they are prohibitive for many less wealthy scholars and institutions around the world. An article during 2016 in Science described how a PhD candidate in Iran would have had to spend \$1,000 a week (money he didn't have) just to read the papers he needed for his studies. Similarly according to the author in the US, taxpayers spend \$140 billion every year supporting research they can't easily access.*

A ray of hope

Based on these facts most of the world's scientific knowledge is still locked behind expensive paywalls. But pressure is building — via the rise of academic paper pirating, and the increasing availability of pre-publication manuscripts — for publishers to change their business model. Now, a coalition of scientific funding agencies in Europe finally wants to tear these paywalls down. *The clumsily named cOAlition S (“OA” is for “open access.” The “S” for science, or solution) is a group of science funding agencies from 11 European countries. Altogether, these funders — which include UK Research and Innovation and the Research Council of Norway — spend \$8.8 billion per year on grants to scientists for their research. Only around 15 percent of journals worldwide run an open access model.*

Here's what they want: By 2020, these funders will mandate that anyone who gets money from them must publish their results in a journal without a paywall. Private funders, like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, already stipulate any papers that come from their grants must be open access. The cOAlition S is following their lead. It has explained that “Monetizing the access to new and existing research results is profoundly at odds with the ethos of science, (the cOAlition S on its website). There are other forces at play that may put pressure on the publishing industry to increase access. One is the rise of pirating academic papers. In 2011, Russia-based neuroscientist Alexandra Elbakyan founded the website Sci-Hub, which has grown to host more than 50 million academic papers. Elbakyan claims this is nearly all the paywalled scientific knowledge that exists in the world. These papers are free for anyone to view and download. The service, however is illegal though extremely popular.

In 2016, Science conducted an analysis of Sci-Hub's web traffic (with the cooperation of Elbakyan). It found that 3 million unique IP addresses downloaded a total of 28 million documents in a six-month period between September and March 2016. And the number of users could actually be even higher “because thousands of people on a university campus can share the same IP address,” according to Science.

Many of these users came from the United States. But a great many others came from poorer nations like Tunisia and India, where the biggest hurdle to accessing scientific information may be high journal costs. Another trend: Scientists are increasingly publishing pre-publications versions of their studies (often called pre-prints). These study drafts are often nearly identical to finished, published, studies. And they're free to access.

Would this really change academic publishing?

But will this group of European funders, which represents only a small slice of research funding worldwide, really force journals to adopt open access? Perhaps. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funds about \$4.6 billion

worth of science every year. And when they mandated the science generated from these grants be published in open access journals.

Additionally, Nature reports the New England Journal of Medicine and Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences “quietly changed their policies last year to offer a permanent OA publishing route for Gates grant holders.” The cOAlition S funders have an even larger financial footprint than the Gates Foundation, and presumably, could put similar pressure on publishers.

Another thing to note: These changes wouldn't necessarily destroy the business of scientific publishing. Sure, universities pay a lot of money so that their students and faculties need access to research. Costs per college vary. But in 2012, even the very well-endowed Harvard University complained that their \$3.5 million a year subscriptions bill was “untenable.” Someone will have to pay for the peer review, and the staff that runs the journals. Open access journals, like PLOS, often pass on the costs of publishing to study authors. It costs an author \$3,000 to publish in PLOS Biology, for example. And the Gates Foundation paid the publisher of Science \$100,000 for a year of publishing their papers un-paywalled.

It's also possible that scientists will increasingly bypass the journal system, directly publishing their papers outside the traditional system of peer review (the benefits of which are hotly debated). So science, overall, is becoming more open and accessible, despite journals' continued reliance on paywalls. The question now is: Will more journals catch up to the trend?

Final word

Cordially, I invite the academicians, the educators, the researchers, students and the public to open up their mind, express their views and send these to the editor-in-Chief. These response would be published as letters to editor. They can also give their views in the form of article. Of course, no fee would be charged for the publication of letter to the editor or mini articles on this issue.

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