

Indexed journals with no or low article processing charges: An alternative publishing venue for Pakistani researchers

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Publishing research is an integral part of an individual's academic career. It is a requirement during higher education (e.g., Masters, PhD). Publication profile is also needed for job appointments and promotions as a mandatory requirement by several organisations. For example, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has specified the number of publications required for academic jobs and promotions.¹ Therefore, many of us in academia are under constant pressure to publish for further professional growth. However, two major questions for the researchers from low- and middle-income countries, particularly Pakistan, are: 1) what are the options for open-access publishing with no or low article processing charges? and 2) are such journals indexed in major bibliographic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science and/or PubMed? To answer these questions, this editorial aims to present information about indexed journals with low or no article processing charges, with particular emphasis on journals from Pakistan.

While the traditional, subscription-based publishing does not incur article processing charges for an author, open-access publishing model, depending on its type, may require authors to pay the publishing or article processing charges. These charges may vary depending on the type of the publisher or country of publication of the journal. Generally, the article processing charges for open-access (or hybrid) journals hosted by mega publishers (e.g., Elsevier, Sage, Springer Nature, Wiley) may vary from <1000 to >10000 US dollars with most charging roughly around 3000 dollars.^{2,3} Although publishers offer waivers or discounts, especially to authors from low-and middle-income countries, it is not always easy to secure full waiver.² Some publishers offer discounts or vouchers for reviewing a manuscript for their journals but the system to claim them is designed in a way that it does not serve the authors. Therefore, authors, particularly from Pakistan, often struggle finding open-access options with no or low article processing charges.

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For this editorial, we extracted (on 26 October 2023) the data for health science journals from Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and Scimago Journal Ranking (for indexation in Scopus). We also looked at the websites of specific journals if the information in the metadata was outdated or unavailable and updated it if required. We found that 48 health science journals from Pakistan were indexed in major bibliographic databases including Scopus, DOAJ, Web of Science and PubMed. Of these, 17 (35.4%) had submission charges ranging from 1000 to 10000 Pakistani rupees (or 10 to 100 US dollars). In addition, 32 (66.7%) had publication charges ranging from 4000 to 50000 Pakistani rupees (or 35 to 650 US dollars). All journals with submission charges incurred publication charges as well. While only 5 journals were indexed in PubMed and 4 in Web of Science (based on the Journal Citation Reports), around 69% of journals were indexed in DOAJ and over half in Scopus. Noteworthy, the median turnaround time (average time from submission to publication) was 14 weeks (~3.5 months). The information on article processing charges may be found in Table 1 and detailed information for journals can be found in Table 2.

Clearly, there are several open-access options for researchers from low- and middle-income countries, particularly Pakistan, that are indexed in major

Table-1: Article processing charges, turnaround time, and indexation.

Variable	Categories/ Range	n (%)/ Mean±SD
Submission charges	Yes	17(35.4)
	No	31 (64.6)
Submission charges (in US dollars) ^a	10-200	67.3±56.3
Submission charges (in Pakistani rupees)	1000-10000	3441.2±2416.6
Publication charges	Yes	32 (66.7)
	No	16 (33.3)
Publication charges (in US dollars) ^b	35-650	276.0±197.2
Publication charges (in Pakistani rupees) ^c	4000-50000	15280.0±11792.5
Average time from submission to publication (weeks) ^d	4-52	17.2±10.6
Indexation profile ^e	Scopus	27 (56.3)
	DOAJ	33 (68.8)
	Web of Science *	4 (8.3)
	PubMed	5 (10.4)

DOAJ: Directory of Open Access Journals; ^a: For 13 of 17 journals; ^b: For 26 of 32 journals; ^c: For 25 of 32 journals; ^d: For 35 of 48 journals; ^e: Total does not count to 100% because some journals were indexed in multiple databases; * Limited to Journal Citation Reports.

Table 2: List of journals with their Article Processing Charges (APC) and indexing information.

Journal	Scopus	DOAJ	WoS	PubMed	Turnaround time (weeks) *	Submission charges (USD)	Submission charges (PKR)	Publication charges (USD)	Publication charges (PKR)	
Advances in Animal and Veterinary Sciences	Yes	No	No	No	No information	0	0	Yes	300	Not reported
Anaesthesia, Pain & Intensive Care	Yes	Yes	No	No	4	0	0	Yes	265	45000
Annals of King Edward Medical University	No	Yes	No	No	12	100	3000	Yes	100	5000
Archives of Pharmacy Practice	No	Yes	No	No	21	0	0	No	0	0
Baqai Journal of Health Sciences	No	Yes	No	No	16	0	0	No	0	0
Bioscientific Review	No	Yes	No	No	12	0	0	No	0	0
Esculapio – Journal of Services Institute of Medical Sciences	No	Yes	No	No	12	50	3000	Yes	100	7000
Gomal Journal of Medical Sciences	Yes	Yes	No	No	40	50	10000	Yes	100	20000
International Journal of Dairy Science	Yes	No	No	No	6	0	0	Yes	62.5	Not reported
International Journal of Endorsing Health Science Research	No	Yes	No	No	12	0	0	Yes	100	25000
International Journal of Pharmacy & Integrated Health Sciences	No	Yes	No	No	16	0	0	No	0	0
International Journal of Veterinary Science	Yes	No	No	No	No information	0	0	Yes	300	Not reported
Journal of Animal Health and Production	Yes	No	No	No	No information	0	0	Yes	300	Not reported
Journal of Ayub Medical College	Yes	No	No	Yes	No information	0	0	Yes	Not reported	15000
Journal of Aziz Fatimah Medical and Dental College	No	Yes	No	No	20	0	0	No	0	0
Journal of Cancer and Allied Specialities	No	Yes	No	No	12	0	0	No	0	0
Journal of Fatima Jimmah Medical University	No	Yes	No	No	12	10	1500	Yes	85	8500
Journal of Islamabad Medical and Dental College	No	Yes	No	No	16	Not reported	1000	Yes	Not reported	4000
Journal of Islamic International Medical College	No	Yes	No	No	28	Not reported	2000	Yes	Not reported	8000
Journal of Medical Sciences (Peshawar)	Yes	No	No	No	No information	0	0	Yes	250	10000
Journal of Neonatal Surgery	Yes	Yes	No	No	6	0	0	No	0	0
Journal of Pakistan Association of Dermatologists	Yes	No	No	No	No information	0	0	No	0	0
Journal of Postgraduate Medical Institute	Yes	No	No	No	No information	Not reported	2000	Yes	Not reported	6000
Journal of Rawalpindi Medical College	No	Yes	No	No	24	15	2000	Yes	35	5000
Journal of the College of Physicians and Surgeons	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No information	25	5000	Yes	200	15,000
Journal of the Dow University of Health Sciences	Yes	Yes	No	No	14	0	0	No	0	0
Journal of the Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences	Yes	Yes	No	No	20	50	6000	Yes	100	15,000
Journal of the Pakistan Medical Association	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	36	200	3500	Yes	650	25,000
Journal of University College of Medicine and Dentistry	No	Yes	No	No	12	0	0	No	0	0
Journal of University Medical & Dental College	No	Yes	No	No	24	55	7000	Yes	200	18,000
Khyber Medical University Journal	Yes	Yes	No	No	20	20	2000	Yes	150	13,000
Liaquat Medical Research Journal	Yes	Yes	No	No	6	0	0	Yes	100	20,000
Liaquat National Journal of Primary Care	No	Yes	No	No	12	0	0	No	0	0
Pakistan Armed Forces Medical Journal	Yes	Yes	No	No	30	Not reported	1500	Yes	Not reported	7000
Pakistan Heart Journal	Yes	Yes	No	No	6	0	0	Yes	600	Not reported
Pakistan Journal of Biological Sciences	Yes	No	No	No	7	0	0	Yes	62.5	Not reported
Pakistan Journal of Medical Research	No	Yes	No	No	20	0	0	No	0	0
Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	24	100	5000	Yes	600	30,000
Pakistan Journal of Ophthalmology	Yes	Yes	No	No	24	0	0	Yes	Not reported	10,000
Pakistan Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No information	0	0	Yes	240	10,000
Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research	Yes	No	No	No	No information	50	2000	Yes	150	8000
Pakistan Paediatric Journal	Yes	No	No	No	No information	0	0	No	0	0
Pakistan Veterinary Journal	Yes	No	No	No	No information	0	0	Yes	500	50,000
Proceedings – official journal of Shaikh Zayed Medical Complex, Lahore Pakistan	No	Yes	No	No	12	0	0	No	0	0
RADS Journal of Biological Research & Applied Science	Yes	No	No	No	8	0	0	No	0	0
Rawal Medical Journal	Yes	No	No	No	No information	150	2000	Yes	250	7,500
Rehman Journal of Health Sciences	No	Yes	No	No	52	0	0	No	0	0
The International Journal of Frontier Sciences	No	Yes	No	No	6	0	0	Yes	250	Not reported

DOAJ: Directory of Open Access Publishing; PKR: Pakistani Rupee; USD: United States Dollar; WoS: Web of Science; * Turnaround time: average duration of weeks from manuscript submission to publication.

bibliographic databases offering publication at no or low cost. It is important to understand that most of these journals, not affiliated with a university, do not have financial support from any organization. Therefore, they cover their in-house expenses through article processing charges. Such open-access options are not limited to Pakistan, and readers are encouraged to refer to a previous paper on similar initiatives.⁴ In addition, while beyond the scope of this editorial, previous studies have demonstrated a rise in open-access and its citation impact.⁵

Nevertheless, it has been suggested that regional journals such as those from low- and middle-income countries might fall in a grey zone between high-quality legitimate and predatory journals.⁶ For example, journals from low- and middle-income countries might state questionable metrics mimicking JCR journal impact factor (e.g., Cite Factor, Scientific Journal Impact Factor, Index Copernicus Value) or erroneous indexation information (e.g., Directory of Research Journal Indexing, Index Copernicus, ResearchGate, Google Scholar) making them difficult to differentiate from predatory journals.^{7,8} Therefore, editors of journals from low- and middle-income countries, particularly Pakistan, should ensure to avoid such practices. We hope that the editors strive to consistently improve the quality of their journals.

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