

Editorial 30(2): (i) IIER's 2019 review outcomes; (ii) Unprecedented

From an editorial composing perspective, 30(2) is distinctly more difficult than usual, as two large groups of topics loom larger, hence the (i) and (ii) in this editorial's title. In (i), we reflect upon IIER's 2019 review outcomes and the 2020 surge, whilst in (ii), "unprecedented" is a word which has appeared so frequently in media and academic writing about the Covid19 pandemic, that it offers a succinct "tag" for a reflection upon pandemic-induced changes in academic publishing as an industry.

(i) IIER's 2019 review outcomes

In Editorial 29(3) [1] which presented IIER's review process outcomes for 2018, our reflections focused upon the question, "Is too much research being published?" In revisiting that Editorial, and noting its emphasis upon "mentoring and advising authors" (p.iv), its concluding question presented the central challenge:

What contribution can we make, however modest and time constrained, to progressing the careers of authors and educational advancement for the students and communities they represent? (p.iv)

The standout part, now more than ever prominent, is being *time constrained*. After a "flattening of the curve" during 2019, IIER submissions have accelerated markedly during 2020 (Table 1), with 40 in January, 52 in February, 60 in March, 66 in April, and 75 in May. We could describe this trend as "unprecedented" and "going viral". That is not completely flippant, as there is anecdotal evidence from IIER editorial emails and experiences reported by journal editors elsewhere [2, 3], that campus shutdowns and impositions of working from home have given many academic researchers more time to write up their unfinished research projects and despatch articles to journals. Hence IIER's "spike" peaking (we certainly hope it is peaking) in May 2020.

Table 1: Article review outcomes IIER 2015-19 (a)

Year of receipt	No. rec'd	No. rejected editorially (b)	No. reject ext rev. (c)	No. with-drawn (d)	No. pending	No. accept (e)	No. published (f)	% accept (g)
2020	218	182 (83.5%)	2	0	24	10	41	n.a.
2019	475	365 (76.8%)	48 (10.1%)	6 (1.3%)	0	56	71	11.8%
2018	469	349 (74.4%)	44 (9.4%)	6 (1.3%)	0	70	60	14.9%
2017	306	205 (67.0%)	33(10.8%)	3 (1.0%)	0	65	50	21.2%
2016	196	116 (59.2%)	28 (14.3%)	5 (2.5%)	0	47	40	24.0%
2015	124	75 (60.5%)	2 (1.6%)	4 (3.2%)	0	43	31	34.7%

- a. Data for 2015 finalised 22 April 2016; for 2016 finalised 17 April 2017; data for 2017 finalised 24 April 2018; data for 2018 finalised 20 May 2019; data for 2019 finalised 3 April 2020; data for 2020 is to 30 April.
- b. Review advice composed by IIER editorial staff.
- c. Review advice composed by external reviewers. Note that for both categories b. and c. some of the rejected articles may appear again as receivals later in the same year or in a subsequent year. The reasons for counting these instances as rejections are to enable a clearer cut off for each

year's outcomes, and to align data collection with the editorial advice, used in a significant proportion of cases, 'Reject. Invite resubmission of a revised or expanded work for a new review process', or similar.

- d. Withdrawn means withdrawn at the request of the authors.
- e. The number of articles accepted from a particular year's receipts does not correspond to the number published in each year (column 8), owing to time taken for review and revisions, and fluctuations in the speed of these processes.
- f. The number published in a calendar year, except that 2020 is for first half year, i.e. 30(1) and 30(2).
- g. % accepted = No. accepted x 100/No. received.

The problem of being *time constrained* is very serious, from two perspectives, IIER's editorial staff perspective, and the perspectives of the authors of 90% of the submissions to IIER, who encounter disappointment and meagre feedback, and having to again return to the time consuming task of looking for another journal.

Firstly, from an IIER editorial staff perspective, we have endeavoured to implement a broad suite of recent actions about *time constrained*, especially during mid 2019 and into 2020, including:

1. recruiting and inducting new associate editors;
2. revised routines and durations for the roles of duty editor - acknowledgments, and duty editor - external review process;
3. providing briefer and more rapidly composed editorial advice, with a greater reliance on a library of templates;
4. a reduction in our scope for offering authors the option "encourage resubmission for a new review process";
5. reducing the proportion of articles sent out to external reviewers, and improving the briefings that we give them on how to review for IIER;
6. imposing a more severe rationing based on the criterion "topic and context already well-represented in IIER";
7. exercising a more severe judgment on whether "resubmitted-for-new-review" articles have been sufficiently improved;
8. nevertheless, endeavouring to sustain consideration for the criterion "topic and context under-represented in IIER and the international literature generally";
9. some increased reluctance to engage in copy editing overloads associated with problems in an article's standard of academic English, and its presentation of figures, tables and reference lists;
10. increased attention to broader community interests - the trend with the "significant issues" perspective in IIER's acceptances of articles is towards representing the world's under-represented educational researchers, and under-represented country contexts; a trend that takes IIER towards greater attention to "what we can do for our students and our communities, and others like us", and less attention towards "what methodological or theoretical advances can we offer to the international community of researchers in this specialty".

Of course, there are implementation difficulties, particularly with "recruiting and inducting new associate editors", which we are working through as best we can. These actions and trends are like works in progress, and from time to time revisions and reflections may appear in IIER editorials and on IIER's website.

Emerging from recent years of IIER's academic research publishing activities, we can discern a number of "problem themes" that should be an increasing concern for the academic research publishing industry generally. These concerns, also to be reflected upon from time to time in IIER editorials, include:

- a. A need for established journals and newly emerging journals to "step up" and provide increased capacity in all aspects of editorial staff work, especially in the area of formative advice and mentoring for prospective authors;
- b. A need for journals to improve inclusivity, especially with respect to non-Western contexts, EFL authors, and beginning or junior researchers (a breaking out of the "Anglobubble"?);
- c. A need to improve the performance and vision of editorial boards and senior academics, which relates to helping beginning or junior researchers to improve their presentation of articles (sometimes we feel that journal editorial staff spend too much time acting as mentors or informal supervisors);
- d. A need to inform university leaders and national governments about new visions and more realistic expectations concerning the purposes of research publications (should the "why try to publish research?" question encompass answers that go beyond the simplistic aim, "to create and disseminate new knowledge"?).

Turning now to the *time constrained* perspectives of the authors of unsuccessful submissions to IIER, who have encountered disappointment and increasingly meagre feedback, and once again have to return to the time consuming task of looking for another journal. Our evidence about this perspective is mostly anecdotal, derived occasionally from editorial emails, as illustrated below.

Of the various perspectives of aspiring authors, one of the most familiar to us is *the need to publish the research*. For example (slightly paraphrased and undated, to ensure adequate anonymisation), to illustrate:

... how long it will take for the article to be accepted? ... wanted to know so as I can plan for my viva voce... requirement for [higher degree thesis] viva at my university is ONE Scopus-indexed [journal article] to be accepted.

... please tell me how long time need to publish the research, because one of the conditions of [a university] is [publish research] to development my work and upgrade my academic rank and I have short time to that.

It is very important to me to have one article published in your journal. It is requested by the [government ministry and country] for Ph.D. students like me to publish a manuscript out of [my country]. And your journal is a very good match for my research work. Please, give me an opportunity to publish my manuscript in your journal, I will do everything to correct it.

There was a misunderstanding ... I thought your journal will not accept it anymore. I was worrying a lot about my manuscript because I need it for PhD dissertation defense. So I submitted it to [another Scopus journal] and thank to your comments-improvement, this journal accepted it already. I am very thankful for your comments and support!!!

Of the many implications arising, *how long will it take?* is one of the most immediate to reflect upon and investigate. We can endeavour to obtain a benchmark derived from actual outcomes, in contrast to desired outcomes, for the two categories of cases, one for unsuccessful submissions, and one for successful submissions. Table 2 gives an initial summary for the second category; the first category, being much larger numbers of cases, as Table 1 shows, will be addressed in Editorial 30(3), sometime in August-September 2020.

Table 2: Average times between submission and outcome, for accepted articles

Year and volume(issue)	No. articles	Average days (weeks) between submission and ...	
		Advice of acceptance	Publication
2020, 30(2)	20	91 days (13 weeks)	168 days (24 weeks)
2020, 30(1)	21	113 days (16 weeks)	189 days (27 weeks)
2019, 29(4)	20	136 days (19 weeks)	231 days (33 weeks)
2019, 29(3)	20	163 days (23 weeks)	244 days (35 weeks)

Dates of submission and dates of acceptance advice are recorded in IIER's "all subs" files for each year. Dates of publication are recorded in tables of contents for each issue.

Table 2 presupposes that authors have a strong interest in time to acceptance advice as well as time to publication. Receiving advice of acceptance lowers the stress levels, as authors can proceed with required revisions and other improvements, usually at a non-stressful pace, depending on the due date specified by IIER's duty editor - external review process. As an initial summary, Table 2 shows an encouraging downward trend in the time periods of very high importance to prospective authors, but we must remain very aware that averages do not highlight the problem of cases with times much longer than average.

Table 2 provides IIER with "reasonable benchmarks" of "13 weeks" and "24 weeks" for accepted articles. However, "reasonable" is a problematic, subjective concept, owing to the difficulty of obtaining and interpreting similar data from comparable journals publishing research in the social sciences. To illustrate, one of the most helpful examples found to date, McKinnon (2020), discussed "Time for review" data from 11 "Development journals", finding that "3-4 months is about average". McKinnon referred to "Mean time to first decision" for articles "Conditional on going to referees", which is probably, but not definitely, comparable to the "Advice of acceptance" cells in Table 2. Assessing the "reasonableness" of "13 weeks" and "24 weeks" in Table 2 as benchmarks will require continuing investigation. Likewise, the significance of the curve in IIER's acceptance rate (Table 1) requires much further reflection, given the high importance of the *what are my chances?* question.

(ii) Unprecedented

This is a brief reflection upon pandemic-induced changes in academic publishing as an industry. The difficult, perhaps even unhappy topic of IIER's "spike" in submissions per month has been mentioned above, but pandemic-induced actions in academic publishing is a more relaxing topic (IIER workloads are not affected by their actions!). Below, a few illustrative quotations are given from the websites of some of the world's largest academic book and journal publishers, to illustrate quite interesting features. Figure 1 provides an example of open access and special indexing being granted for content of importance to coronavirus researchers.



Figure 1: Example of open access offered to Covid-19 researchers by Taylor & Francis [viewed 28 May 2020 at <https://taylorandfrancis.com/coronavirus/>]

Figure 2 gives an example of granting a wider extension of open access, with particular reference to researchers in all fields of study, who may seek support "during this challenging time in which many are unable to get to physical libraries, we have expanded our free read-online access to 100 articles per month through June 30, 2020." [5]



Figure 2: Example of a general extension of open access by JSTOR [viewed 28 May 2020 at <https://p.j-img.org>]

Figure 3 illustrates another kind of pandemic-induced action, indicating that academic publishing has lost sales volume, presumably due mainly to campus closures and suspensions of classes in universities and colleges.



 <p>ELSEVIER</p> <p>Home > Books and Journals > Special Offers</p> <p>50% off Print & eBook Bundles</p>	 <p>Super Savings Sale</p> <p>20% OFF Print Books & 35% OFF eBooks</p> <p>April 8, 2020 - May 31, 2020</p>
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Figure 3a: Elsevier book sale [viewed 28 May 2020, <https://www.elsevier.com/books-and-journals/special-offers>]

Figure 3b: Routledge (T&F Group) "super savings" book sale [viewed 28 May 2020, <https://www.routledge.com/sale>]

'Read While You Wait' is now available!

Get immediate ebook access* when you order a physical book! As we all contend with the effects of COVID-19, we remain committed to providing you as our customers with the best experience. While print orders may take longer to reach you, we are offering a unique solution to limit the delay. All print orders now include immediate access to the digital ebook version – **wait no longer, read now!**

Figure 3c: Springer's solution for international delivery problems with books, relevant for researchers in lockdowns [viewed 28 May 2020 at <https://www.springer.com/gp/shop>]

Figure 4 illustrates efforts by publishers to contribute to rapid transitioning into the much expanded use of online teaching and learning during the pandemic, especially in the higher education sector. Figure 4 illustrates an Australasian offer (now closed) by Taylor & Francis' Marketing Manager Australasia, though this publisher's northern hemisphere offer remains open, "In cases where you or your students are unable to access core textbooks because of campus closures, we are offering free access to ebooks ... through the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester." [6].

Online Teaching and Learning resources

We're pleased to offer you free access to a range of valuable resources to help negotiate the transition from in-class to online teaching. From theoretical perspectives to practical tips, this reading list will support you as you and your students adapt to new ways of presenting and engaging with course material.

All of the books available [here](#) will remain fully open through April 24.

Interested in exploring more of our free content for higher education faculty? Visit our [Faculty Resources Hub](#) or contact our local office books@tandf.com.au.

Figure 4: Offer from Taylor & Francis, Australasian Office [viewed 15 April 2020] <https://taylorandfrancis.com/about/global-office-teams/melbourne-office/>

However, there is an abundance of online teaching and learning that are permanently open access, for example from Canada's Contact North [https://teachonline.ca] illustrated in Figure 5.



Figure 5: Contact North (2020). How to develop an online course quickly and effectively. *Online Learning News*, 22 April.
http://send.successbyemail.com/prvw_message2.aspx?chno=050f9fe2-759b-4672-8a07-aad25f0c0975

Figures 1-5 provide only a small sample of the valuable range of unprecedented actions by the academic publishing industry. An interesting sample, but perhaps the most interesting aspect will be post-pandemic. Has the world's appetite for open access and low cost, electronic only delivery been stimulated so much during the pandemic, that it will become very difficult to "snap back" completely, post-pandemic, to the pre-pandemic business models used by the major publishers?

Some commentators are beginning to envisage, or at least hope for, more fundamental changes in academic publishing. For example, *Times Higher Education* correspondent Phil Emmerson [7] has sought to "highlight the need for accommodations that outlive the coronavirus". Advancing a case for journal editors and reviewers to become "kinder and more caring in our practices", Emmerson [7] maintained that:

We must also be hyper-attentive to the ways in which structural inequalities in the publishing process play out - whether they be old or new - and find effective ways to alleviate these, particularly as academia and publishing return to normal (whatever that might look like). ... if we work hard to get this right now, then after the crisis we will be left with a publishing system that is kinder, fairer and more open than the one that we started with. And that can only be a good thing. [7]

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