Editorial 31(2): (i) IIER's 2020 review outcomes; (ii) Text-to-speech, and other diversions

Roger Atkinson
IIER Associate Editor

This Editorial continues IIER's long established routine of presenting the details of article review outcomes, now covering six years, 2015 to 2020 (Table 1). Its second section, "Text-to-speech, and other diversions" is less routine, representing the occasional use of Editorial space to draw attention to diverse issues and developments in the academic journal publishing industry, such as 'Text-to-speech'. The sub-topic 'other diversions' is given that name because sometimes the sub-topic item has been a 'diversion' from the routines of very intense work as a duty editor or copy editor.

Table 1: Article review outcomes IIER 2015-21 (a)

Year of receipt	No. rec'd	No. rejected editorially (b)	No. reject ext review (c)	No. with-drawn (d)	No. pending	No. accept (e)	No. pub lished (f)	% accep-ted (g)
2021	*250*	*n.a.*	*n.a.*	*2*	*n.a.*	*n.a.*	*36*	*n.a.*
2020	670	556 (83.0%)	40 (6.0%)	2 (0.3%)	0	72	80	10.7%
2019	475	365 (76.8%)	48 (10.1%)	7 (1.5%)	0	55	71	11.6%
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 finalised 13 April 2021; data for 2021 is to 31 May.
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d. Withdrawn means withdrawn at the request of the authors.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 receivals 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 2021 is for first half year, i.e. 31(1) and 31(2).
g. % accepted = (No. accepted x 100)/(No. received)

(i) IIER's 2020 review outcomes

The starting point for a reflection upon IIER's 2020 review outcomes is reading previous editorials that provided tabulated data, most importantly Editorials 30(2) and 29(3)

(Atkinson, 2020; 2019). Editorial 30(2) referred to "The difficult, perhaps even unhappy topic of IIER's 'spike' in submissions per month", and expressed a hope about "IIER's 'spike' peaking (we certainly hope it is peaking) in May 2020".

A "peaking" did become evident (Table 2), with IIER entering a plateau or steady state at about 50 submissions per month. Again, this has to be expressed as a hope rather than a confident prediction. The matter of "hope" arises because we are not confident about the adequacy of our attempts to "implement a broad suite of recent actions", as listed in Editorial 30(2) (Atkinson, 2020).

Table 2: Number of submissions to IIER by month, 2020 and 2021

Month in 2020												Month in 2021				
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
40	52	60	66	75	50	57	51	56	52	48	63	51	46	45	63	44

Of the ten actions listed in Editorial 30(2), the most problematic is "1. recruiting and inducting new associate editors". We continue to seek new volunteers, particularly from amongst recently retired or made redundant academics with experience in educational research, with the thought in mind, "Surely the number of such persons is increasing?" The time commitment sought from new associate editors is not continuous, being structured into duty editor months, which can be intense (see Table 2 for the number of submissions that duty-editor: acknowledgements and initial assessments has to consider in a duty editor month). The main qualities sought are high skills in academic English, good familiarity with the culture of educational research, and patience and empathy in mentoring authors of submissions to IIER. High expertise in specific fields of educational research is not essential, as we can turn to our Editorial Board and other external reviewers when specialist opinions are required.

Editorial 30(2) also referred to "a number of 'problem themes' that should be an increasing concern for the academic research publishing industry generally", under the circumstances of marked increases in the numbers of submissions to journals (Atkinson, 2020). However, progress, if any, towards changing of industry attitudes seems slow and uncertain. To illustrate, this comment appeared recently in *Physics Today*:

> We are in the middle of a publication pandemic that needs to be managed, and all of us must play a role in trying to stem that tide. (Newton & Sreenivasan, 2021)

Stem the tide? Perhaps academics and educators generally, especially in the education sector, need to proclaim an inclusive alternative, "Bring on the tide!" This would recognise that the major contributor to these marked increases in the numbers of submissions to journals is very likely the recent marked increases in the numbers of university students and teachers, in many parts of the world, that in earlier times were under-supplied with higher education. These new and recent arrivals should be offered inclusivity, not the exclusivity implied by "stem that tide".

To paraphrase and adapt Newton and Sreenivasan (2021), consider instead, "All of us must play a role in bringing on that tide", because the opposite, "stemming that tide" is untenable. The phrase "all of us" is especially pertinent for editors, publishers and editorial boards, who are in very privileged, but also very difficult positions. Privileged, because the articles we read in the everyday routines of academic publishing represent best efforts from authors and researchers aspiring towards a pinnacle of intellectual and scholarly achievement: a research article, in English, in a well-recognised international journal. Difficult, because very many journals seem to be "maxed-out".

The term "maxed-out" is a colloquial English expression, most frequently encountered in the context of credit card debt, to indicate reaching a maximum that you may not exceed. In IIER's case, "maxed-out" is about 72 to 80 articles accepted per year, which has the consequence that acceptance rate has been falling towards 10 to 12%, as submissions have risen towards 600 to 650 per year. Editorial and reviewer time for mentoring unsuccessful authors (Table 1's two columns for number rejected) has to be rationed, and therefore many promising opportunities to develop an acceptable article may be lost.

Clearly this is a difficulty for authors, who often may have very limited access to formative advice from patient and empathetic mentors, that may lift a "We regret to advise..." rejection, to a "We are pleased to advise..." acceptance. It is also a difficulty for IIER editorial staff who provide most of this rejection advice (83% of cases in 2020, Table 1). Imposing a pass rate of 17%, which decreases further to 10.7% after external review rejects (2020 data, Table 1), creates a stress, which is only partially relieved by our understanding of the "maxed-out" factor as outlined above. It is difficult, as we could assert confidently that we all would prefer to be a party to the conduct of a "mostly happy" class, in contrast to a "mostly unhappy" class.

(ii) Text-to-speech, and other diversions

For some years, this Co-Editor for IIER has regarded "text-to-speech" as an assistive technology for vision-impaired persons. However, during routine copy editing of references lists for IIER articles, in recent times I have noted this feature appearing in a number of Taylor & Francis journals.

Although checking of a references list should proceed at a rate of about 20 to 30 references per hour, there is often a temptation to divert into some reading of a reference. "Listen" seemed worth following up in the case of Murphy (2020), cited by Blackley et al. (2021). The reason for taking an interest was not from the perspective of assistive technology; it was related to copy editing advice often given to the authors of accepted articles as an inclusion at the end of the authors' proof reading copy. From my "template library":

> One way to work through the copy editing changes will be to have a co-author or other colleague read aloud the revised version that you submitted, from one computer screen, whilst you view the copy edited and formatted version (this version) on another computer screen at an adjacent desk. After completing (and taking notes as needed), swap places and repeat this process. Remember that owing to time constraints (http://www.iier.org.au/iier29/editorial29-4.html), only corrections that are especially important for improving the accuracy of representation of your work and ideas should be submitted.

Reading aloud is often suggested as an important strategy in copy editing (for example, Grey, n.d.), though we have little evidence about the utility of the advice quoted above, and how it may help in the cases of EFL/ESL authors who are very frequently represented in IIER. However, it does seem that "Listen" could provide a valuable resource for EFL/ESL authors, to help them acquire skills in discerning "when something doesn't sound right" (Grey, n.d.), in the context of the culture of educational research.

The "Listen" facility in Taylor & Francis journals is provided by *ReadSpeaker* who describe their services as follows:

> ReadSpeaker is a global voice specialist providing dozens of languages and lifelike voices. Using its own industry-leading technology, the company delivers some of the most natural-sounding synthesized voices on the market. (https://www.readspeaker.com)

If you test "Listen" with Murphy (2020), you will be reminded about how we overwork the hyphen. Covid-19 (or COVID-19) seems to be a well-established compound noun, but rather amusingly, *ReadSpeaker* refers to "Covid minus nineteen". However, it is very unlikely that listeners will hear "Editorial thirty minus two". A very small scale operation such as IIER cannot afford to commission *ReadSpeaker*, though readers may notice an increased use of phrases having the form "now covering six years 2015 to 2020" (instead of "now covering six years 2015-2020"). Sometimes we could give the overworked hyphen a break.

Increased use of ORCID identifiers in IIER articles
Attention to this topic was prompted by a Scholastica (2021) blog posting on article-level metadata, which included support for more extensive adoption of "... ORCID identifiers for primary and contributing authors (the more ORCIDs you can include in metadata the better)". After consulting ORCID's advice (ORCID, 2021) we have adopted a standardised format, for example ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8500-0266 which is visible in the HTML abstract page for the first article in this issue. This format provides a full web address ('URL') to facilitate recognition by search engines, though we are not at present making these into active hypertext links (human readers, if any are interested, will have to copy and paste into their web reader's address box).

We do not require authors to give ORCID IDs or personal website addresses in their submissions. Use of one or both is optional, though encouraged, with the location being in bios at the end of an article, along with a mandatory item, current email address.

IIER bibliometrics

We invite authors and readers to view the page, http://www.iier.org.au/about/iier-bibliometrics.html, as IIER seems to be consolidating its position in Scimago SJR's "Q2" and Scopus Metrics' 54th percentile. CiteScore by Scopus shows IIER's consistent advances: after staying at 0.6 for 2012-15, commencing a rise to 0.8 in 2016-17, and further rises to 1.2 in 2018, 1.4 in 2019, and 1.6 in 2020.

References

Atkinson, R. (2019). Editorial 29(3): Is too much research being published? *Issues in Educational Research*, 29(3), ii-iv. http://www.iier.org.au/iier29/editorial29-3.html

Atkinson, R. (2020). Editorial 30(2): (i) IIER's 2019 review outcomes; (ii) Unprecedented. *Issues in Educational Research*, 30(2), ii-ix. http://www.iier.org.au/iier30/editorial30-2.html

Blackley, S., Wilson, S., Sheffield, R., Murcia, K., Brown, P., Tang, K.-S., Cooper, M. & Williams, P. J. (2021). How have Covid-19-related changes to tuition modes impacted face-to-face initial teacher education students? *Issues in Educational Research*, 31(2), 421-439. http://www.iier.org.au/iier31/blackley.pdf

Grey, I. B. (n.d.). *10 strategies for effective proofreading and editing.* WordRake Blog. https://www.wordrake.com/blog/ten-strategies-for-effective-proofreading-and-editing

Murphy, M. P. A. (2020). COVID-19 and emergency eLearning: Consequences of the securitization of higher education for post-pandemic pedagogy. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 41(3), 492-505. https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2020.1761749

Newton, P. & Sreenivasan, K. (2021). Commentary: The publication pandemic. *Physics Today*, 26 May. https://physicstoday.scitation.org/do/10.1063/PT.6.3.20210526a/full/

ORCID (2021). *Brand guidelines.* https://info.orcid.org/brand-guidelines/

ReadSpeaker (2021). *Lifelike text to speech for your customers.* https://www.readspeaker.com

Scholastica (2021). In pursuit of rich article-level metadata: 5 elements journal publishers should prioritize. *Scholastica Blog*, 8 June. https://blog.scholasticahq.com/post/metadata-elements-publishers-should-prioritize/

Please cite as: Atkinson, R. (2021). Editorial 31(2): Editorial 31(2): (i) IIER's 2020 review outcomes; (ii) Text-to-speech, and other diversions. *Issues in Educational Research*, 31(1), ii-vi. http://www.iier.org.au/iier31/editorial31-2.pdf