

Editorial 31(3): "Please help me to identify the status of the journal..."

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An unusual "Email to the Editor" arrived this year, containing only one paragraph, under the subject line "Request for some information about IIER":

Can you please help me to identify the status of the journal whether it is WoS or not. According to SJR it is Q2, please help me to define it is web of science or not. Can you please send me any evidence in this regard?

What's the story behind this unusual request concerning two sources of bibliometric data for IIER, Clarivate's "Web of Science" (WoS) [1], and Scimago's "SJR"? [2]. As the monthly duty editor for acknowledging submissions, I (RA) responded:

Hello Dr [X],
We are always pleased to hear feedback from IIER authors [IIER citation deleted] ... I guess that you have been asked the question, "Is IIER in WoS?" To offer a formal reply that can be re-used in part as an FAQ (frequently asked question): IIER does not undertake to provide evidence concerning Web of Science coverage. IIER expects that researchers and academic leaders with some experience in these matters will be able to do lookups for themselves, via Clarivate [1] or IIER's bibliometrics page [3]. Inquirers will find that IIER is WoS-listed and has a JIF ("journal impact factor") for 2020 and a number of previous years, and is indeed currently in Scimago's Q2.

However, IIER declines to report upon IIER's JIF because Clarivate's data is not open access. Paid subscriptions are needed. Also, we suggest that interested persons should consider some important lines of inquiry besides indications of journal status as given by WoS, Scopus, Scimago and others. For example, we often recommend that prospective authors self-assess the quality of a proposed submission, by searching IIER [4], using keywords that are relevant for their article. The main question will be, "Can I do as well as, or perhaps even better than, similar articles already published in IIER?" Another important question will be, "Is my topic, country context, research question, or some other aspect under-represented in IIER?"

To put this matter in another way, we also suggest asking oneself, after inspecting the tables of contents for several volumes of IIER, and reading a good number of articles related to one's research, "Can I see my research article earning a place in IIER? Is the journal publishing authors like me? Do IIER articles cite authors like me?"

You may be interested in the most recent IIER statement on submission numbers and acceptance rates, published in Editorial 31-2 [5] (you should feel especially proud of your xx(x) article, which is in very select company!).

An explanation, not unexpected, came back very quickly from Dr X. Whilst this has to be carefully paraphrased to preserve anonymity, it could be explained that the matter related

to the level of recognition of Dr X's publication in an international, peer reviewed academic research journal, namely IIER. A senior academic in Dr X's university, apparently, had maintained that IIER did not attain Q2 in Scimago's SJR, and therefore Dr X's IIER article was ineligible for the level of recognition being sought. This explanation propelled Dr X's "Please help me..." into the category of high interest for insights into important problems in contemporary academic research publishing.

After thanking Dr X for the explanation, I expressed some hopes about "...improving the representation of XXX and other developing countries in the international educational research literature", and about IIER being "a good 'early detector' of emerging new talents and influencers in this field". I surmised to Dr X that:

We are all lifelong educators, hopefully used to conducting a diverse range of educative endeavours, including one of the most difficult of all educative tasks, which is educating faculty and university leaders about how to best portray and promote the academic research publishing efforts they are heading.

I hasten to add that "educating faculty and university leaders about ... academic research publishing" is a task for that industry as a whole. One small scale open access journal such as IIER can do no more than set a high standard example and hope for numerous emulators to emerge.

Why is Dr X's "Please help me..." deemed as "high interest"? Although for many decades participants in the academic journal publishing industry have been concerned about journal status and journal rankings, we may be entering a new period of better perspectives upon this perennial topic. To arrive at that speculative and tentative finding, I indulged in a reminiscence upon my personal experiences with journal status matters, drawing mostly upon numerous Editorials I composed for AJET [7] and some for IIER [8]. From this, I delineated about four consecutive periods of changing dominance as journal rankers:

1. The period commencing in about the year 2000 was marked by journal editors striving to attain "indexing" by well-known dominators in these activities, most notably ISI Thomson, Scopus and ERIC, who at the time were being slow and selective in their additions of new journals. Journal status in this period was determined mainly by the decisions of the owners and operators of these database services.
2. The period commencing in about 2006 was one I characterised with the phrases "blood, sweat and four Tiers", "Tier review process", "the tyranny of Tiers", and "clique bodies". Unlike Period 1, it was driven by an Australian Government agency, the ARC (Australian Research Council), who dictated journal status via its *Ranked Journal List*, at least to Australian authors and to Australian-based journals such as IIER. The Tiers were nominally A* (top ranked 5%); A (next 15%); B (next 30%); and C (the bottom ranked 50%).

3. The period from the end of the first decade of the 21st century, marked by the rapid rise of automated indexing and citation counting - the "bot" era, with databases seeking much expanded or even universal coverage, and attention shifting from journal level to article level metrics. Google became one dominator influence upon journal status, especially in the case of small scale journals such as IIER that could not undertake their own large scale promotions. Influence upon journal status started moving away from the high selectivity and idiosyncrasies of Periods 1 and 2.
4. The period onwards from about the end of the second decade of the 21st century, will be marked (I hope) by the emergence of more critical and more diverse views about journal status and the current most influential bibliometric, citation counts. From IIER copy editing checks upon about 1000 reference citations per year, I'm gaining an impression that IIER authors from EFL backgrounds and researching in non-Western contexts are more likely to cite references from lower status journals, compared with authors researching in Western contexts.

The outline above is speculative, but it does suggest some interesting research projects for a period when time becomes available, especially differences in citation patterns observed for authors from different English language backgrounds and researching in different country contexts. For the present, within the constraints of a concise editorial, the intention is limited to an initial back grounding for "Please help me to identify the status of the journal...". However, it should be enough information to show that status is a contested and fluid concept, and to remind ourselves that "You cannot assess the scholarly quality and societal importance of a research article by the company it keeps" (or, "by the perceived status of the journal it was published in").

A suggestion was made above to Dr X about considering "some important lines of inquiry besides indications of journal status as given by WoS, Scopus, Scimago and others." Instead of emphasising IIER's "middling" journal metrics, we urge readers who want to know more about IIER to do more of their own finding out, based on the questions offered to Dr X. Rather than leaving the matter of journal status and ranking to Scopus, Scimago and others, engage actively in constructing your own view about the "goodness of fit" between your proposed article and IIER (or similar journals).

Of course that is likely to require substantial amounts of reading in English, from educational research articles closely related to your own proposed article, but the return on such an investment of time and effort can be much more than simply a more detailed and more personal view of the status of IIER (or similar journals). There is increased immersion in the discourse of educational research, expanded knowledge of method and other sections of an article, and possibly also finding new and relevant citations for improving your article. You may even find some helpful advice for relaying to "... faculty and university leaders about ... academic research publishing".

References

1. Clarivate (2021). Web of Science. <https://mjl.clarivate.com/home> (enter "issues in educational research" in the Search journals box, including the quote marks).
2. SJR (Scimago Journal & Country Rank) (2021). Currently Scimago ranks IIER at Q2, 606 in 1275 education/social sciences journals; if restricting to "Only Open Access Journals and "Only WoS Journals, IIER ranks at Q2, 70 in 189.
3. IIER bibliometrics. <http://www.iier.org.au/about/iier-bibliometrics.html>
4. For advice on searching IIER, see <http://www.iier.org.au/about/iier-search.html>
5. IIER (2021). Editorial 31(2): IIER's 2020 review outcomes. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier31/editorial31-2.html>
6. Power, A. & Atkinson, R. (2017). Editorial 27(2). *Issues in Educational Research*, 27(2), ii-v. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier27/editorial27-2.html>
7. AJET (Australasian Journal of Educational Technology). Volumes 18 to 28, 2002 to 2012. <https://ajet.org.au/index.php/AJET/issue/archive>
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