

Editorial 34(2): (i) IIER's 2023 review outcomes; (ii) Revision of briefing for reviewers; (iii) Miscellanea

Roger Atkinson and Clare McBeath
IIER Co-Editors

This Editorial begins with IIER's usual annual presentation of the details of article review outcomes, now covering nine years, 2015 to 2023 (Table 1). This Editorial's second section outlines a draft revision of IIER's guidelines and briefing for Associate Editors and external reviewers. The third section continues the 'Editorial miscellanea' that we initiated in IIER Editorial 34(1).

(i) IIER's 2023 review outcomes

Table 1: Article review outcomes IIER 2015-23

Year of receipt	No. rec'd	No. rejected editorially (a)	No. reject ext review (b)	No. with-drawn (c)	No. accept (d)	No. published (e)	% accepted (f)	Date finalised (g)
2023	827	697 (84.3%)	40 (4.8%)	6 (0.7%)	84	83	10.2%	18/04/24
2022	645	525 (81.4%)	43 (6.7%)	6 (0.9%)	71	82	11.0%	17/04/23
2021	662	531 (80.2%)	39 (5.9%)	6 (0.9%)	86	73	13.0%	30/05/22
2020	670	556 (83.0%)	40 (6.0%)	2 (0.3%)	72	80	10.7%	13/04/21
2019	475	365 (76.8%)	48 (10.1%)	7 (1.5%)	55	71	11.6%	03/04/20
2018	469	349 (74.4%)	44 (9.4%)	6 (1.3%)	70	60	14.9%	20/05/19
2017	306	205 (67.0%)	33(10.8%)	3 (1.0%)	65	50	21.2%	24/04/18
2016	196	116 (59.2%)	28 (14.3%)	5 (2.5%)	47	40	24.0%	17/04/17
2015	124	75 (60.5%)	2 (1.6%)	4 (3.2%)	43	31	34.7%	22/04/16

- a. Review advice composed by IIER editorial staff.
- b. Review advice composed by external reviewers. Note that for both categories a. and b. 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.
- c. Withdrawn means withdrawn at the request of the authors.
- d. The number of articles accepted from a particular year's receivals does not correspond to the number published in each year (column 7), owing to time taken for review and revisions, and fluctuations in the speed of these processes.
- e. The number published in a calendar year.
- f. % accepted = No. accepted x 100/No. received
- g. Date of completion of author advice on rejection or acceptance.

In Editorial 33(2) [1] we expressed a cautiously optimistic perspective upon the annual article review outcomes table:

After eight years [2015 to 2022], perhaps Table 1 could be showing us a very tentative glimpse of a "steady state" characterised by a self-imposed cap of about 80 articles

published per year from about 660 submissions per year, resulting in an acceptance rate of about 12%. We do need a "steady state", though it does lead to disappointments ... [1]

However, our very tentative glimpse of a "steady state" was obliterated during 2023. Instead of "about 660" we recorded 827 submissions, averaging 68.9 per month, much above the hoped-for average of 55.0 per month. December 2023 set a new record with 95 submissions. Our 2024 experience has continued to be difficult, with an average of 60.2 per month for January to May.

IIER and very many other journals have to continue adapting to the twin pressures of increasing *disappointments* for authors, and increasingly *difficult* workload experiences for editorial staff and reviewers. Although we often revisit the broad suite of actions outlined in IIER Editorial 30(2) [2], four years ago, renewed energy will be needed on implementations. We especially need improved response times for the authors of submissions that we cannot accept, although improved response times may mean curtailing our formative advice to these authors. We also need more extensive, more detailed advice being given expeditiously to many or even most of our accepted submissions, and the small numbers in the category of "encourage resubmission for a new review process", although such improvements in advice for these categories may mean further curtailing of our advice for the authors of submissions that we cannot accept.

(ii) Revision of briefing for reviewers

IIER's Associate Editors are rostered for monthly periods in one of two roles, *Duty Editor acknowledgements* and *Duty Editor external reviews*. If all goes well, Associate Editors will have several "months off" between "rostered months" as *Duty Editor acknowledgements* or *Duty Editor external reviews*. Working to a roster that allows "months off" is a much-appreciated feature for IIER's Associate Editors.

Our main first step towards addressing the problem of "increasingly *difficult* workload experiences for editorial staff and reviewers", outlined above, concerns new guidelines for *Duty Editor external reviews*. The new guidelines actively explore ways to reduce the amount of time that an external reviewer may have to commit to reviewing an article. Experience over the years suggests to us that many reviewers can reach a soundly-based recommendation, to reject or accept an article, within a time frame that is less onerous than the time frame required to compose comprehensive advice that can be copied to the article's authors.

Therefore, to trial this perspective, we are proposing new guidelines under which *Duty Editor external reviews* will advise reviewers that after reading their allocated article, they are to return one of the following two kinds of responses.

Recommendation: Accept

Optionally, add succinct comments about ways to improve the article.

Recommendation: Reject

Required, add succinct reasons for recommending rejection of the article.

In both cases, *Duty Editor external reviews* may exercise discretion in communicating "succinct comments" (if any) or "succinct reasons" to an article's authors. *Duty Editor external reviews* may exercise discretion in elaborating upon "succinct comments" or "succinct reasons", and in consulting one or more other members of IIER editorial staff for additional opinions.

The main purpose underlying this revision of IIER's external review process is reducing the time demands we impose upon reviewers, thereby reducing the amount of time *Duty Editor external reviews* has to devote to finding reviewers and 'chasing up' returns of reviews. However, it could in some cases increase the time demands upon *Duty Editor external reviews*, who will bear more of the load in composing advice on ways to improve an article. To help alleviate this problem, a part of the load may be shared with others in our editorial team, and assisted by expansions of our guidelines, checklists and templates for Associate Editors.

Miscellanea

Miscellanea 1: Guest editorial

IIER's re-introduction of the guest editorial [3], undertaken in IIER 34(1) by Dr Paul Gardner, now has a very notable follow-up contributed by South Africans Dr Emma Groenewald and Dr Kevin Teise [4]. Their title, "The North-South research gap: Challenges and lessons learnt", aligns well with an approach IIER has taken for some years. This is our consideration of 'country under-represented in the international literature' as one potential factor, along with others, in acceptances of submissions. "Country under-represented" and "North-South research gap country" are categories with much overlapping.

To illustrate further, Editorial 34(1) reiterated that IIER's associate editors and reviewers are relying to an increasing extent upon the rejection criterion, "topic and context already well-represented in recent issues of IIER" [3]. Readers may infer a corollary: being "under-represented in IIER" may contribute towards the case for IIER's acceptance of an article. However, identifying a submission's topics as "already well-represented" or "under-represented in IIER" can involve a high degree of subjectivity. Here the adverb "subjectively" (or adjective "subjective") cannot be readily defined. For our purposes here, we could say that subjectivity is having to rely very much upon what is in one's own mind, or in the minds of a very small team of colleagues, and there is little scope for recourse to "rubrics", or "scoring guides", or "criteria", or any community-wide, accepted sets of rules. A similar problem arises with IIER's assessing whether a submission presents a "significant issue in educational research". Although it is a subjective criterion, it is a 'must satisfy' for IIER acceptance.

We do try to reduce subjectivity by frequent use of advanced Google Scholar searches that nominate "issues in educational research" in the box for "Return articles published in" (very many IIER authors or aspiring authors have been given review advice that include results from such searches). But a problem with subjectivity in editorial decisions remains,

exacerbated by the current 'spike' in our submissions, discussed in section (i) above. Sadly, there is never enough time for very detailed reading that could help to improve objectivity.

Miscellanea 2: Book reviews

Recently, IIER received an invitation to undertake a book review for:

Lindsey, T., Makruf, J. & Pausacker, H. (Eds.) (2023). *Islam, education and radicalism in Indonesia: Instructing piety*. Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/Islam-Education-and-Radicalism-in-Indonesia-Instructing-Piety/Lindsey-Makruf-Pausacker/p/book/9781032216126>

IIER's last book reviews were published in IIER 23(1) and 23(3), over a decade ago (see <http://www.iier.org.au/iier23/2013conts.html>). The marked escalation of editorial staff workloads since then, well-illustrated in Table 1 above, has prevented the return of IIER into book reviewing. Apart from the workload aspect, another reason for not returning into book reviewing is that developing the guest editorial space seems a more attractive expansion. Whilst the invitation to review the book edited by Tim Lindsey, Jamhari Makruf and Helen Pausacker has provided a reminder to outline very briefly the reasons for IIER retiring from book reviewing, there is another reason for mentioning it. This is IIER's increased attention to the article selection criterion, "significant issue in current educational research", which is likely to help grow the Indonesian representation in future issues of IIER. Scanning the "Table of Contents" for *Islam, education and radicalism in Indonesia* suggests a rich, scholarly list of significant issues.

Miscellanea 3: Is your article ready to submit?

A small-scale academic publishing enterprise such as IIER can be a shameless borrower of service information from elsewhere. Having confessed that, we would like to recommend some high-quality advice for prospective authors:

Taylor & Francis Author Services (2024). *Ready to submit your paper? Use this article submission checklist to find out*. <https://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/publishing-your-research/making-your-submission/article-submission-checklist/>

The T&F advice contains succinct checklist items such as "Is your article a good fit for your target journal?"; "Did you have another pair of eyes read through your article?" and "Check by reading the aims and scope of the journal, and look at recently published articles." Reading the T&F advice reminds us about the need to find time for improving IIER's relatively brief checklist at <http://www.iier.org.au/iier-submissions.html>, also referred to in (ii) above.

Another item in the T&F advice is "For double-anonymous peer review, an anonymized version of your article will be needed." IIER's advice on this point is bluntly different, "Include author names and contact details at the beginning of your article", and "Do not attempt to anonymise or 'blind' any self citations that may be included; IIER requires that all references be available for potential inspection by reviewers" (<http://www.iier.org.au/iier-submissions.html>). Here the main reminder to us concerns reviewing our current description of IIER's review process. At present we state in

<http://www.iier.org.au/iier-inf.html> that "All articles published in IIER have been subjected to a double blind peer review process with 2 or 3 reviews per article." However, that applies for only about 10 to 12% of submissions (Table 1 above).

Furthermore, we may look into changing from "double blind" (T&F's "double-anonymous") to "single blind" for IIER's external reviews, to make a small but useful time-saving for editorial staff, and more importantly, emphasise commitments to two criteria which are impaired if anonymisation of context is applied, namely "country under-represented" and "significant issue in educational research", as outlined in *Miscellanea 1* above. Consideration of this change is also prompted by the knowledge that anonymisation may often be circumvented by Google searches. This is evidenced by IIER copy editing experiences with 'missing references' (some articles have been very bad this year). The majority of these instances have been actioned reasonably rapidly by use of Google searches to identify the missing reference. The downside arising for authors is that we will give increased attention to quality of references list as a potential *rejection trigger*.

References

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3. Atkinson, R. & McBeath, C. (2024). IIER Editorial 34(1): (i) Introducing a guest editorial; (ii) Editorial miscellanea. *Issues in Educational Research*, 34(1), ii-x. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier34/editorial34-1.pdf>
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