

Editorial 34(4): (i) "... Could not be evaluated ..."; (ii) Editorial miscellanea

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IIER Co-Editors

(i) "... Could not be evaluated due to workload": A crisis in academic journal publishing capacity?

In recent months and years, IIER editorial staff have made an increasingly frequent use of 'template' phrases and sentences such as:

We regret that due to the emergence of a backlog in IIER's review process, we have temporarily suspended our providing of the formative advice from IIER editorial staff that usually accompanies IIER's "initial assessment" advice. The backlog is due to continuing high rates of submission (<http://www.iier.org.au/iier34/editorial34-2.html>) [1] ... During Jan-Nov 2024, IIER has averaged 66.4 submissions per month, including 76 for October and 75 for November. ...

In time, we will resume the usual provision of formative advice under the heading "IIER editorial staff comments". We are very aware of the value of advice on reasons for declining a submission, and suggestions on how to attain an acceptable standard for publication in an international journal. However, resumption may take some months, owing to the current high rate of submission of articles and the problem of long queues waiting for responses.

Currently, advice under the heading "IIER editorial staff comments" is very limited, as illustrated in this 'template':

IIER editorial staff comments

Under IIER's current circumstances of high submission rates and acceptance rates falling to near 10%, we are becoming more limited in the extent to which we can cater for topics ... [insert a few phrases about the topics, methods, context, etc., presented in the submission for which the *Duty Editor acknowledgements* [1] is providing "initial assessment" advice].

However, as may be expected, some 'pushback' does occur, as illustrated by this recent correspondence, which was the origin for the scene-setting part of the title for this section, "... *Could not be evaluated due to workload*" (some paraphrasing of XX's plea has been made, to ensure higher reliability of anonymisation):

Dear Editor,

You said that our article could not be evaluated due to workload. However, I must get an article in a Scopus-indexed journal. Is there any way ours can be evaluated? I would be very glad if you could help me in this regard.

Hello XX,

We do regret that at present IIER is very tightly constrained, being unable to command more work from the current team, experiencing sustained high rates of submission, a slowdown in our search for new associate editors, capacity capped at about 80 articles accepted per year, and a severe and persistent lack of international journals that emulate IIER's important features.

One editorial project that we must try to reserve some time-for-progressing is the compilation of a list of journals that emulate, or nearly emulate, IIER's important features that attract authors. In brief, in no particular order, these include perceived high status ("Scopus-indexed" [3]), world language (English), open access (DOAJ listed), no APCs (no article processing charges), not subjected to a publisher copyright (using Creative Commons licence "BY ND"), publishing a wide range of topics (being a 'generalist' research journal), providing a high standard, free copy editing service for accepted articles that extends into substantive editing, and a willingness to engage cooperatively and respectfully with non-Western authors, EFL/ESL authors, and country contexts that are under-represented in the international educational research literature.

I'm sorry that at present we cannot be more helpful.

Roger
For IIER

There is much to 'unpick' about "... *Could not be evaluated due to workload*". Compromises are necessary in the conduct of journal activities. One of the most important compromises is that opting for brevity in IIER's "initial assessment" advice enables a more rapid response. Nearly always our "initial assessment" advice is issued within a shorter period than the "2-4 weeks" we have specified for some years [2]. Rapid feedback is preferred by authors, even if very brief and very often negative ("... we regret to advise that we decline to accept it for IIER publication").

It may seem ironic or even contradictory in the context of a musing about editorial workloads, to propose more work, namely "... compilation of a list of journals that emulate, or nearly emulate, IIER's important features...". The excuse is that some time invested now may save a larger amount of editorial time in the future. Occasionally we receive questions from disappointed authors ("Can you suggest another journal?"), and we know that we can improve our "initial assessment" advice if we can offer at least a few specific suggestions. Also, our general reading about trends in academic publishing as an industry, and large amounts of time spent on the copy editing of references lists does give insights into journals that are comparable to IIER.

The paragraph beginning "One editorial project ..." was not composed for XX. It was mainly a draft for an editorial item, subsequently expanded in *Miscellanea 3* below, as we seek to offer more precisely and persuasively *a voice*, on behalf of a growing number of frustrated prospective authors, concerning deficiencies in the world's academic journal publishing industry, in the research field of education. How well (or how poorly) is capacity expanding?

How well (or how poorly) are needs being defined and served? Is there a *crisis* for some particular kinds of capacity and needs?

IIER's current perspective features "high submission rates and acceptance rates falling to near 10%", and "temporarily suspend[ing] our providing of the formative advice ...". There seems sufficient evidence that we can invoke the melodramatic word *crisis* in the subtitle for this section, *A crisis in academic journal publishing capacity*. However, that has to be carefully qualified, to be focused on the particular kinds of capacity and needs as we perceive from the successful and unsuccessful submissions to IIER. This is how we arrived at *Miscellanea 3: One editorial project...* that is discussed below. We need to know more about other educational research journals similar to IIER. Is there really "a severe and persistent lack of international journals that emulate IIER's important features"?

(ii) Editorial miscellanea

Miscellanea 1: Time saving style for editorial correspondence

Much of our editorial correspondence is now in a terse, time saving style, often saying, in effect, "Please do your own reading to answer your question". To illustrate:

1a. Dear Sir/Madam,

I am willing to get my paper published in your journal. May I ask whether or not you take systematic review papers in PRISMA-SCR form? I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Hello XXX,

Please explore the representation of systematic reviews in IIER using the following Google Scholar search string (copy and paste into web reader address box):

https://scholar.google.com.au/scholar?as_q=&as_epq=systematic+review&as_oq=&as_eq=&as_occt=any&as_sauthors=&as_publication=%22issues+in+educational+research%22&as_ylo=2020&as_yhi=&hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5

About 116 results since 2020

Best wishes,

Dr Roger Atkinson

Duty Co-editor for acknowledging submissions, December 2024

1b. ... I would like to know if there is an express review form for the magazine. If so, could you tell me the associated cost?

[Q received after an initial response had been sent to XXY]

IIER does not have any provision for 'express reviews'. The main reason is that in the interests of fairness and transparency, we endeavour to maintain an orderly queue based on date of receipt. Resorting to the vernacular and idiomatic Australian English, 'no queue jumping'. {RA's terse response to XXY}

1c. Dear Editor,

I have sent my manuscript to IIER Journal and received a response today. I am not clear with the reason for rejecting my manuscript. Is it due to exceeding page limits or that you did not want the topic of reflecting on [topic redacted]? Does it mean I have to

reduce the pages and resubmit or I should stop the process at this point? Should I expect comments on my manuscript or that is all? I would be grateful if you could let me know these queries.

Thank you.

Hello XYY,

Please read <http://www.iier.org.au/iier34/editorial34-2.html> for insight into why we are unable to give reasons for rejecting an article. We expect to receive about 750 articles during 2024. We expect that we can accept only about 84 of these.

Very regrettably, owing to staffing constraints, feedback upon articles that we have no capacity to accept is severely limited, though sometimes a few words are given about one or two matters that may be noted. In a small number of cases, we may encourage a resubmission for a new review. In your case we did not invite a resubmission, but we did make a brief indication of one step that could be undertaken to improve prospects for acceptance by another journal.

Best wishes,

Roger
For IIER

Miscellanea 2: Respect for all participants in research

We mentioned above, as one of IIER's important features that attract authors, IIER's "willingness to engage cooperatively and respectfully with non-Western authors ...". One of the reminders about mentioning that as a "feature" was a very recent news story from Australia's *ABC News* [4], about a "study indicating racist bias among academics at Australian universities". As this seemed very contrary to IIER's direction of "engaging cooperatively and respectfully with non-Western authors", we had to follow up by examining the main source for the *ABC News* item, Goldsmith et al. (2024) [5]. To summarise briefly (revealing one of the biggest downsides about *workload*: the severe constraints upon one's own reflective and exploratory reading), RA noted:

- compliments due to *ABC News* reporter Jenny Cai - in depth, well-balanced, superb journalism (one error, "Smith" should be "Goldsmith");
- compliments due to *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership* for boldly publishing Goldsmith et al. (2024) [5], notwithstanding its "rejection triggers" (that's IIER jargon), and for some frank and insightful views and storytelling about IJEPL [6], such as "... we reject the use of impact factors as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles or of the journal as a whole." [7]
- a mix of compliments and criticism due to Goldsmith et al. (2024) [5], for boldly publishing findings from an experiment that should not have been conducted (emails from fictitious students!?) and gallantly trying to make the best of their error; criticism for a lack of an apology and poor choice of journal for publication [4], [5]
- as to poor choice of journal, if submitted to IIER, Goldsmith et al. (2024) [5] quite likely would encounter one or more of four brief reasons ("rejection triggers") for declining: (i) it is not educational research, try submitting to a journal in experimental psychology; (ii) date range for data collection not stated, is probably 'old' (2017-18); (iii) our reluctance to accept for educational research purposes the proposition: "the use of deception in the study, which is an

- authorised and very accepted method of studying bias" [4]; and (iv) the absence of corroborating evidence (*ABC News* reporter Jenny Cai knew how to address the gap).
- no compliments for the "approval from the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee" [4] [5]. Did said Committee scrutinise the proposed methodology? Awareness of ethics parallels with health sciences research featuring placebo and experimental groups?
 - finally, the main noting here is of a case study that reveals another facet of *respect*, namely *Respect for all participants in research*. Sending bulk unsolicited and deceptive email shows an unfortunate lack of respect for *participants in research*.

Revealing another facet of *respect* (or lack of it) is the main justification for using up editorial writing time and editorial space on *Miscellanea 2*.

Miscellanea 3: One editorial project ... what sources could be used?

This idea, hastily sketched out in editorial email cited above, obtained a limited initial trial through our compilation of Table 1 as background preparation for a recent local webinar [8], though the Table was not presented. It explored "What sources could be used?"

Table 1: A partial 'profile' for three Australian educational research journal articles

	AER	AJTE	IIER
Full name	Australian Educational Researcher	Australian Journal of Teacher Education	Issues in Educational Research
Home page	https://link.springer.com/journal/13384	https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte	http://www.iier.org.au/
Main or sole sponsor	Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE)	Edith Cowan University (ECU)	Western Australian Institute for Educational Research (WAIER)
Publisher	Springer (commercial)	University	Small scale professional societies
Copyright	Option non-OA - transfer copyright of the article to the Publisher. Option OA - CC BY	Assign to ECU, certain rights granted back to author. https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/publication_rights.pdf	Creative Commons CC BY-ND 4.0 http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/
Scopus	CiteScore 2023 4.6. Rank #306/1543 Percentile 80th. https://www.scopus.com/sourceid/29540	CiteScore 2023 1.8. Rank #844/1543, Percentile 45th. https://www.scopus.com/sourceid/17600155115	CiteScore 2023 2.8. Rank #594/1543, Percentile 61st. https://www.scopus.com/sourceid/12734
Scimago	Q1, SJR 2023 0.97 https://www.scimagojr.com/journalsearch.php?q=29540&tip=sid&clean=0	Q2, SJR 2023 0.39 https://www.scimagojr.com/journalsearch.php?q=17600155115&tip=sid&clean=0	Q2, SJR 2023 0.53 https://www.scimagojr.com/journalsearch.php?q=12734&tip=sid&clean=0
Digital object identifier)	https://doi.org/10.1007/13384.2210-5328	https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte	DOI not sought, see http://www.iier.org.au/iier27/editorial27-2.html
Found. yr (curr vol)	Presumably 1974 (v. 51)	1976 (current vol. is presumably vol. 49)	1991 (v. 34)
Artics. in 2023 [2013]	Vol. 50, 91 articles, 1163 pages [Vol. 40, 42 articles, 657 pages]	Vol. 48, 48 articles, 927 pages [Vol. 38, 108 articles]	Vol. 33, 83 articles, 1622 pages [Vol. 23, 29 articles, 435 pages]
Range	'Generalist'; international	'Teacher educ.; international	'Generalist'; international
Acceptance rate	No public information found.	"Intending authors should be aware that the Journal has a rejection rate in excess of 50%"	Tabulated data for 2015-23 at http://www.iier.org.au/iier34/editorial34-2.html
Open access	OA purchase US\$2990	Fully open access, no charges	Fully open access, no charges
Charges	No APC for non-OA	No article processing charge	No article processing charge

The topic of difficulty in finding a journal to accept your research work has been well-represented in IIER (Groenewald & Teise, 2024 [9]; Indrayadi, 2024 [10]). Table 1 illustrates many of the sources we can use, over time, to help answer more positively the question in the minds of IIER's disappointed authors, "Can you suggest another journal?".

References

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2. IIER (2021). *Notes for intending authors*. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier-submissions.html>
3. "Scopus-indexed" refers to inclusion in the database maintained by Scopus, an Elsevier product. Scopus states "We seek out and ensure that only the most trusted, peer-reviewed scientific articles, books and conference papers are available on Scopus." At the time of writing the current filename is "ext_list_October_2024.xlsx", size about 28.5 MB. containing 46535 rows. Open access via *Scopus Preview* at <https://www.scopus.com/home.uri>
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