Journal Publishing in Bangladesh

What Can Bangladesh Tell Us About Research Communication?

Dr. Haseeb Md. Irfanullah
Editorial Board Member
Bangladesh Journal of Plant Taxonomy

Outline

Taking Bangladesh as an example of scholarly communication from the Global South,

- What are the major transformation the country has experienced in the recent decades?
- How is its publishing system doing at the moment?
- What are the reasons behind the present situation?
- How can we further improve the publishing system?
Over the last couple of decades, Bangladesh has seen remarkable transformation

1. Accessing scientific publications
2. Making local research available globally
3. Developing researchers’ and journal editors’ understanding of international publishing – standards and practices
1. Accessing scientific publications

- Linked with global initiatives focusing on least-developed and middle-income countries
  - Research4Life (2002–)
  - INASP’s PERI (2001–2013)
- Revolution in the ICT sector
8,900 institutions
120+ low- & middle-income countries
Access to 90,000 journals & books

Strengthening Research and Knowledge Systems (SRKS)

30+ international publishers provide low-cost access to journals

2,000 universities

25+ developing countries

100+ universities’ librarians trained
Accessing scientific publications

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2. Making local research available globally

- Publishers’ website is an avenue now-a-days.
- In 2007, BanglaJOL (of INASP) started bringing Bangladeshi science journals on one online platform.
New Journals:
Journal of Biodiversity Conservation and Bioresource Management joined on 25/04/2018

New Issues:
Bangladesh Journal of Medicine Vol.30(1) 07/02/2019
Journal of Bangladesh Society of Physiologist Vol.13(2) 05/02/2019
Journal of Bangladesh Academy of Sciences Vol. 42(2) 03/02/2019
Bangladesh Pharmaceutical Journal Vol.22(1) 31/01/2019

There are now 142 journals on BanglajOL with 1749 Tables of Contents listing 22,503 articles. 21,622 of the articles are available in full text (PDF).

142 journals 1,749 issues 21,600+ full-text articles
Many Bangladeshi journals got benefited from the exposure BanglaJOL has given.
3. Developing researchers’ and journal editors’ understanding of international publishing system
But, there was a need for collective effort to change the academic publishing ecosystem of Bangladesh with common understanding of the concerned stakeholders.
First BanglaJOL Dialogue

- In December 2016, in Dhaka with BAS and INASP
- 30 journals’ editors participated
- Led to the formulation of a Roadmap to improve the journal publishing practices in Bangladesh.
- Implementation of the Roadmap was not followed up due to absence of leadership and ownership.
So, how is Bangladesh’s journal publishing doing now?

- First, assessing the Journal Publishing Practices and Standards (JPPS) database
- Second, from two surveys done on 30 odd BanglaJOL journals in Dec 2016 and Nov 2018
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In the late 2017, the African Journals Online and the INASP launched the JPPS.

Here journals of 5 JOLs – BanglaJOL, CamJOL, MongoliaJOL, NepJOL, & SLJOL – have been evaluated against a series of criteria.
The JPPS assessment process rates each JOL partner journal into one of the following six rating categories:

- **One star** - has met the basic requirements for at least two years
- **Two stars** - compliant with additional publishing practice quality criteria
- **Three stars** - consistently excellent in all the technical and editorial publishing best practices set out in the assessment criteria of the Journal Publishing Practices & Standards (JPPS) framework
- **New title** - has been publishing for less than two years, but meets basic requirements
- **Inactive** - has not added new content to the JOL platform in over one year
- **No stars** - not currently meeting the basic criteria for inclusion on a JOL platform
Bangladesh results

- 47% of BanglaJOL journals are classified as inactive.
- Only 7 BanglaJOL-hosted journals have received Two Stars.
- It is only 5% of the total 142 journals hosted by BanglaJOL.

Global results

- Out of total 419 journals hosted on 5 JOLs, 46 (i.e. 11%) have received Two Stars.
- No journal has received Three Stars yet.
So, how is Bangladesh’s journal publishing doing now?

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- Second, from two surveys done on 30 odd BanglaJOL journals in Dec 2016 and Nov 2018
Print vs On-line

- % of journal available only in print
- % of journal available only online
- % of journals available both in print & online

2016 vs 2018
Manuscript processing time (from submission to acceptance)

- % of journals with avg. time <1 to 2 months
- % of journals with avg. time 3 to 5 months
- % of journals with avg. time 6 months or more

2016 vs. 2018
Timeliness in publishing

% of journals published on time

% of journals struggling to publish online on time

2016 2018
How international are the journals?

- % of journals with foreign members on the editorial boards
- % of journals publishing foreign authors' papers
- % of journals with foreign reviewers reviewing manuscripts

2016 vs. 2018
% of journals indexed by at least 1 agency

Max. indexing agencies for a journal:
2016: 12
2018: 13
% of journals not charging authors at all | % of journals charging authors (as handling fee, colour plates/extra page charges etc.)

- 2016
- 2018
Average journal publishing cost per issue (GBP)

Range of journal publishing cost:
2016: GBP 100–1,140
2018: GBP 180–3,640
Journal Office, Staff, Payment

% of journals with designated offices | % of journals with designated staff | % of journals, which have staff, but are unpaid/ volunteers

2016 | 2018

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So, while many Bangladeshi journals are doing well in certain vital publishing standards and practices, most are struggling.
But, why such situation exists?

- Despite being a part of the global scholarly ecosystem, Bangladesh’s journal publishing has developed its own ways to thrive in relative isolation.
- Such isolation also depends on how researchers, research, and its communication are perceived by the scholarly society and the society in general.
Characterizing ‘isolation in scholarly publishing’

- Journal publishing is “self-sustaining” –
  - Financially:
    - Running cost is very low
    - Society and/or the government pay for it
  - Content-wise:
    - Locally generated manuscripts suffice the need
    - International authorship is limited
Characterizing ‘isolation in scholarly publishing’

- The prevailing situation is serving the purpose of the researchers as content providers, their
  - Promotion
  - Increment
  - Recognition

- So, in general, there is no real need or motivation or incentive for improving Bangladeshi journal’s quality or standard or practice.
Characterizing the perceptions

• Except agricultural research, benefits of other research is rarely highlighted by the media or by the politicians.
• Genome sequencing of certain crop or animal took by storm since it was related to patenting and cultural/national identity of the country.
Characterizing the perceptions

- Researchers are perceived as thinkers, not really change-makers.
- Limited scope of hardcore research in development decision-making.
- Career of a researcher is often not clear.
Characterizing the perceptions

- An assessment of ‘promotion rules’ of 7 public universities showed that, in almost all cases, papers do not have any advantage, if these are published in
  - International journals,
  - Indexed journals or
  - Journals with Impact Factors

- A new, advanced, uniform promotion rules has been proposed by the government in Dec 2017, but is yet to be implemented.
International mechanisms for ensuring journal quality have limited influence on such scholarly isolation.

- 18 journals are ranked by SJR
- 9 journals are included in Pubmed
- 4 Journals have JCR Impact Factor

What can be done to improve this situation?
First, hold regular dialogues among researchers, editors, policy-makers, coordinating bodies, & other stakeholders.

- **Knowledge Aspect:**
  - This will clear up misunderstandings
  - fill in knowledge gap
  - update on what is going on in scholarly world globally (Plan S, AI in scholarly comms).

- **A sense of position:**
  - Understand where Bangladesh’s research fit in.
Create a shared vision:

Build trust among actors, then create a common vision. E.g. it worked in transboundary water governance in South Asia.

Negative aspects:

Help them to realize how ‘scholarly isolation’ would hurt them, what they will miss.

Bangladesh’s research on Bangladesh may remain unrecognized by the global community, while work on Bangladesh done by foreigner researchers will be recognized. E.g. IPCC’s 5th Assessment Report
- **Second**, along with dialogue, we need concrete actions, institutions, policy and support systems.
- A **national system** is crucial to oversee and guide southern journals’ quality and standard, backed by strong political and policy support.
  - The Government of Bangladesh is very serious about achieving the SDGs. Linking scholarly communication with the progress towards the SDGs would get due political support.
This support could be translated into **National Science Journal Publishing Rule** by the Ministry of Science and Technology, with Ministry of Education and Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council.

This would in turn be reflected in the **Promotion Rules** of the universities and public research organizations.
o A **Bangladesh Journal Watch** should be established for Bangladeshi journals’ quality monitoring. This would be supported by the above proposed Rule.

o To help editors, an **Editing Helpdesk** should be established under the auspices of a competent organization.
Summary

- Despite being a part of the global scholarly publishing ecosystem, a national publishing system can thrive in isolation.
- International quality control systems may not change the situation.
- An urge to improve this situation needs to come from the country through dialogues, and policy & institutional support systems.
Questions

- Are the proposed measures sufficient?
- Will they work?
- What do the experiences from other countries suggest?
- What can the Global North do to break the scholarly isolation of the Global South?
Thank You

Email: hmirfanullah@yahoo.co.uk
Twitter: @hmirfanullah