Insiders and outsiders

Every week, the *South African Journal of Science* receives submissions which are clearly not within the scope of the Journal. As our mission statement says, as a multidisciplinary journal, we are interested in ‘publishing high-quality original research from Africa or on African-relevant issues’. From an administrative point of view, dealing with these out-of-scope submissions is quite easy, if time-consuming. We can simply inform authors of the scope issue and suggest that they submit elsewhere.

Underlying this common occurrence, though, is information about the current global climate in academic publishing, and this is an issue of broader concern. Almost none of these submissions are from scholars in high-income countries. Another reasonably common occurrence for us is a pre-submission query in which there is inevitably a question about page fees payable to the Journal, also invariably from a scholar who is not in a high-income country. Our Journal is in the very lucky position of being a diamond/platinum open access journal, meaning that we do not have article-processing charges because we receive funding from the Department of Science and Innovation through ASSAf, so the query is easy to deal with, but is revealing in itself.

What is clear from our experiences, and these are far from unique to our Journal, is that there is a cohort of scientists and scholars based in low- and middle-income countries (and certainly not in Africa alone) who are trying to have their work published in journals which enjoy a good reputation (as measured, for example, by accredited impact factors), and read by a global audience. A further feature of these submissions, and not just of these submissions, is that many authors struggle to write in clear English. Where the quality of written English is good, though, there are many occasions where the authors do not appear to have thought adequately about the multidisciplinary audience of the Journal and write in ways which may exclude our potential readership from being able easily to engage with the research being presented.

We are certainly not alone in the science community in South Africa and further afield in grappling with the imperative to open science in any way that we can in terms of who produces knowledge and who has access to it. At the same time, though, every week we gain a glimpse into the worlds of those who continue to be excluded. Although we at the Journal do our best to assist all those who wish to publish with us and to suggest alternative outlets, the fact is that, generally speaking, out-of-scope submissions is quite easy, if time-consuming. We can simply inform authors of the scope issue and suggest that they submit elsewhere.

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