

Is There Any Interest Among Iranian Biomedical Journals and Researchers to Publish a “Letter to the Editors”?

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Dear Editor,

The “letter to the editor” or the “correspondence letter” is the most popular section of some scientific journals (1), providing an opportunity for the readers to state their viewpoints to help clarify the scientific evidence recorded in the literature.

Despite the intensive peer- review process, it is possible even in high quality journals to find an article with certain errors in methodology part, statistical analysis and the generalization of the results (2). Unfortunately, both Iranian biomedical journals (IBJs) and researchers are not interested to publish “letter to the editor” (3). PubMed, Scopus and Google Scholar comprehensively investigated and concluded that among 330268 published articles by Iranian authors (until December 2015), only 3883 “letter to the editor” were found. Indeed, “letter to the editor” consists of approximately 0.01% of the articles published in IBJs. The small number of “letter to the editor” in IBJs as compared to other journals could be attributed to two main reasons:

1. Readerships and researchers: In Iran, most researchers read abstracts and conclusions of the articles to obtain the information they need (3-5). Others may read the full text, but do not have a critical overview and read an accepted article without appraising the content or assessing its quality. In addition, critical appraisal is routinely taught to undergraduate and postgraduate students and also to health care professionals in many countries (4); however, in Iran, it has not been properly embedded in the curriculum of health and medical sciences. Accordingly, the small number of “letter to the editor” writing in IBJs could be attributed partly to the lack of critical appraisal skills among some Iranian readers (3).

2. Policies of Iranian ministry of science (IMS) and IBJs editorial boards: Regarding current IMS regulations for academic promotion, the “letter to the editor” and “original article” have been scored between 0.5 - 1 and 5 - 7 (3, 6).

Hence, there seems to be a little reward for academics to spend time on and effort in writing a “letter to the editor”.

In some cases, the editorial board of IBJs believes that the “letter to the editor” as an article may damage the journal reputation. In fact, if the editorial board accepts the “letter to the editor” which points out the methodological errors of a previously published article, it implicitly denotes that publishing such an article may damage the journal reputation (7, 8).

Considering the important role of “letter to the editor” in enhancing the trustworthiness of the published articles as well as the accountability of such journals to the scientific community, we as the associate editors of IBJs suggest conducting more researches to assess the facilitators and barriers to publishing “letter to the editor”, in order to hasten the process of composing and publishing in IBJs.

Footnotes

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