



Analysis of Korean journals rejected by Scopus since 2011

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Abstract

This paper aims to provide publishers and societies who plan to apply for their journals to be listed in Scopus with critical guidelines to evaluate their performance from an objective, globally-informed perspective. It presents a qualitative case study of how applications of Korean journals to Scopus have been evaluated over a 9-year period (2011–2019). A content analysis was conducted of 106 applications that were rejected by the Content Selection and Advisory Board, according to a combination of 14 quantitative and qualitative selection criteria. This case study was used to categorize instances of failure and to illustrate practical strategies for local journals to use when applying to Scopus based on the lessons to be learned from rejected cases. The results of the analysis show that local journals should enhance the quality of the articles they publish, review why the journal should be considered international, and clearly address editorial policies and the concept, scope, and strategies of the journal.

Keywords

Scopus; Reasons of rejection; Quality of articles; International journal; Editorial policy

Introduction

Publishers and academic societies submit their journals to abstract and indexing databases (DBs) such as Scopus and Web of Science to increase their journals' visibility and impact and to provide access to global researchers. Being listed in these abstract and indexing DBs is a critical opportunity and is a signal of achieving the status of an international journal. Inclusion in Scopus not only provides publishers and societies a sense of achievement, but also serves as an indicator that researchers have recognized the quality of a journal.

Scopus has a clearly stated selection policy, and the Content Selection and Advisory Board (CSAB), which is an international independent review board, evaluates suggestions by publishers and societies on an ongoing basis [1]. This advisory board reviews new titles based on quantitative and qualitative measures, evaluates whether the titles have sufficient scientific value and academic excellence to be indexed by Scopus, and makes a final decision of whether to

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accept or reject an application.

As the largest abstract and indexing DB of global research content, Scopus includes titles from more than 5,000 publishers globally [2]. According to statistics on active titles indexed by Scopus, 24,520 titles have been listed as of May 2019. The United States accounts for the largest amount of listed titles (6,113, 24.9%), followed by United Kingdom (5,679 titles, 23.2%), the Netherlands (2,266 titles, 9.2%), Germany (1,683 titles, 6.9%), and Switzerland (641 titles, 2.6%). With 289 titles (1.2%), Korea is ranked in the 15th place (Table 1). The indexed titles are recognized as having passed a transparent and rigorous review process.

All suggested titles should meet all five minimum criteria—peer-review, English abstracts, regular publication, references

in Roman script, and a publication ethics statement—to be considered for a CSAB review. If a title meets the minimum criteria, the subject chairs of the CSAB review it according to the combination of 14 quantitative and qualitative selection criteria, including journal policies, content, journal standing, publishing regularity, and online availability [3]. In total, 5,710 titles (48%) were accepted of the 12,005 titles reviewed by the CSAB from 2011 to 2019 as of April 2019 (Fig. 1). An analysis of the titles reviewed from the top 20 countries with the most titles reviewed showed that 733 titles from the United States, 1,002 titles from the United Kingdom, 161 titles from India, and 130 titles from Korea were accepted, while 514 titles from the United States, 225 titles from the United Kingdom, 847 titles from India, 227 titles from Spain, 211 titles from Italy, 215 titles from Poland, 141 titles from Netherlands, 229 titles from Brazil, 257 titles from Iran, 85 titles from Germany, 231 titles from Romania, 137 titles from South Korea, 52 titles from Switzerland, 154 titles from Czech Republic, 156 titles from Turkey, 157 titles from Ukraine, 111 titles from Colombia, 114 titles from Indonesia, and 102 titles from Malaysia were rejected. The

Table 1. Number of indexed titles by countries

Country	No. of journals	Percentage	Country	No. of journals	Percentage
United States	6,113	24.9	Poland	345	1.4
United Kingdom	5,679	23.2	South Korea	289	1.2
Netherlands	2,266	9.2	Canada	267	1.1
Germany	1,683	6.9	Egypt	209	0.9
Switzerland	641	2.6	Turkey	187	0.8
Spain	567	2.3	Australia	179	0.7
China	564	2.3	Czech Republic	176	0.7
France	499	2.0	Romania	175	0.7
Italy	467	1.9	Iran	157	0.6
Russian Federation	447	1.8	Croatia	146	0.6
India	430	1.8	Singapore	140	0.6
Japan	374	1.5	Belgium	123	0.5
Brazil	366	1.5	Others	2,031	8.3

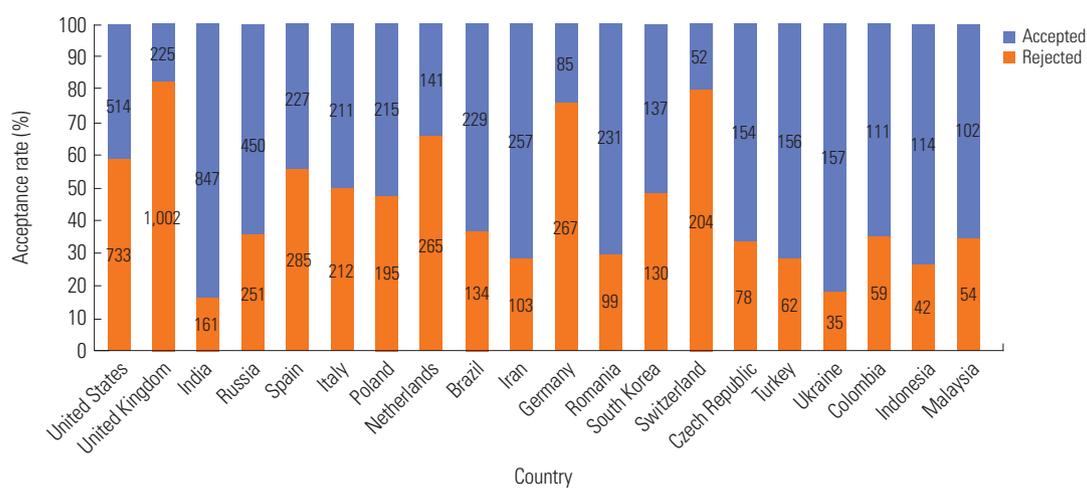


Fig. 1. The number of reviewed titles from the top 20 countries.

number of accepted Korean journals increased from 22 titles in 2011 to 28 titles in 2018. The acceptance rate for Korean titles during 2011-2019 was 48.7%, which is similar to the world average of 48% (Fig. 2). This study was conducted to investigate how many Korean journals were rejected in the CSAB review process, to categorize the reasons for rejection, and to provide strategic advice to editors preparing to apply to Scopus.

Methods

Scopus is a source-neutral abstract and indexing DB curated by independent subject matter experts [2]. Data over a 9-year period from 2011 to 2019 were collected from the Scopus Title Evaluation Team and investigated. The title, primary subject field, date of application, date of final decision, final decision (acceptance or rejection), narrative messages to publishers or societies, and the tracking ID of suggested journals from Korea were summarized. In this analysis, the author verified the evaluation results of 106 Korean titles that re-

ceived specific reasons for rejection after the CSAB review. After a review of the rejection messages to publishers and societies, these different reasons could be grouped into six categories containing similar reasons. Each category can be illustrated with a detailed explanation, and in the Results section, we suggest how publishers and societies in Korea can overcome those obstacles and weaknesses.

Results

In this analysis, the reasons for the rejection of 106 titles by the CSAB were reviewed and classified into the following six categories: quality of articles, why a journal should be considered international, editorial policies, number of articles, delayed publication, and subject area, as summarized in Table 2. This paper focuses on three categories of reasons for rejection and presents several factors that publishers and societies should consider as they prepare to apply for inclusion in Scopus.

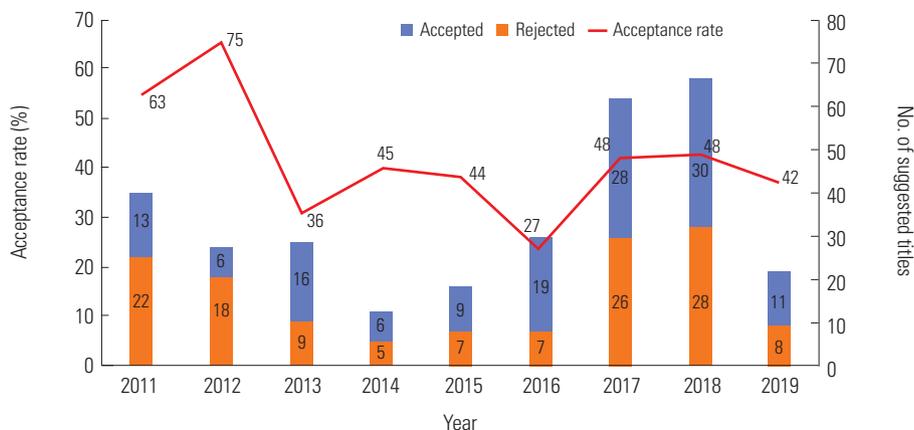


Fig. 2. The number of Korean titles reviewed by year.

Table 2. Reasons for the rejection of 106 titles

Reasons for rejection	No. of journals	Percentage	Reasons
Quality of articles	39	36.8	Poor quality, grammar, no impact, low citations
Why the journal should be considered international	36	34.0	No international diversity, no geographic diversity, single-institutional journals, national and institutional journals
Editorial policies	17	16.0	Unclear aims and scope, concept, lack of guideline and information, lacking indications of quality control
No. of articles	6	4.7	Too few or too many articles
Delayed publication	4	3.8	Delayed publishing schedule, irregular publications
Subject area	4	3.8	Similar to other journals, too many journals dealing with the subject, too broad, too specific
Total	106	100.0	

Quality of articles

The quality of articles published in a journal has a positive impact on the journal's overall quality and impact. Thirty-nine of the 106 rejected titles (36.8%) were rejected due to quality issues with the journal. The CSAB subject chairs indicated that poor quality of the articles, unacademic content, uneven scholarly quality of articles, poor-quality English abstracts, and low citedness of the articles were reflective of insufficient journal quality, and made a final decision of rejection.

How can we assess journal quality? In order to ensure that high-quality articles are published and to improve the quality of articles, several factors should be considered strategically. First, journals should have a rigorous peer-review policy, with many experts in the field reviewing submitted articles. Peer review plays a critical role in scholarly publishing and is designed to help improve the quality of articles and published research. Through robust peer review, publishers and societies can improve articles' quality; high-quality articles then contribute to improving journal quality, supporting the cultivation of a stable journal brand. Second, technical editing improves the accuracy and readability of research articles. To improve the accuracy and quality of articles, publishers and societies can implement a standardized process, involving a clearly defined reference style, policies on the use of abbreviations, and regularly checking articles for grammatical errors, clarity, completeness, and consistency [4]. Third, it is important to analyze the journal's citedness and to evaluate the quality of journal articles objectively. Publishers and societies can identify their journal articles' citations in publications indexed in Scopus and can compare their journal's impact to that of other titles belonging to the same subject area. Furthermore, they should evaluate the tendency of review articles and other article types to receive more citations than original articles [5] and assess who—in terms of which institutions and countries—cite journal articles. Finally, although the quality of articles is clearly critical for increasing their impact, publishers and societies should also understand the indicators used to evaluate research, the importance of international collaborations, and the challenges involved in the development of strategies for improving the quality of articles. Publishers and societies should increase the visibility of articles to attract attention from authors and researchers across the world, resulting in more opportunities to be cited by other papers. A study found that the number of downloads of articles had a clear effect on citations, because many downloads occur before a paper is cited [6].

Why a journal should be considered international

Thirty-six of the 106 titles (34.0%) were rejected for being insufficiently international. The CSAB subject chairs decided to reject 36 titles after evaluation for lacking international diver-

sity among authors and editors, being of limited interest for a wider international audience, and taking a localized approach, as such journals fail to fulfill the requirements for inclusion in an international DB such as Scopus.

How can we define an international journal? Various arguments on this issue do not present a clearly defined distinction between international and national journals. Generally, if journals are indexed in abstract and indexing DBs such as Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed, are published by global publishers such as Elsevier, Springer, Wiley, and Nature, and have many customers and research institutions that subscribe to the journal, they can be recognized as international journals. Before applying to Scopus, publishers and societies can assess the internationality of a journal based on several evaluation factors.

First, it should be determined whether the journal has objectives that are obviously international in scope. Second, is it attractive for authors and researchers from around the world to submit their papers to the journal? Third, how can publishers and societies differentiate the journal from other journals dealing with the same subject in Scopus? Fourth, it is necessary to evaluate international diversity among the editors and authors of the journal. Publishers and societies are asked two relevant questions—"What is the geographic distribution of authors publishing in this title?" and "What is the geographic distribution of editors of the title?"—and must choose among the following answers: "international: different continents," "international: same continent," "national: different institutes," and "national: same institute" [7]. If international diversity among editors and authors is very limited, the publisher or society should identify the reasons for low diversity and develop strategies to achieve the desired ratio of international diversity by establishing working relationships with more editors and authors from different continents.

Editorial policies

Seventeen of the 106 titles (16.0%) were rejected after the CSAB review due to their editorial policies. These reasons for rejection include several specific factors, such as an unclear editorial concept/strategy, unconvincing journal policies, inadequate journal policies, and others. It is recommended that publishers and societies should review the status of their policies and identify whether their editorial policies are well-targeted and clearly stated.

First, publishers and societies should ensure that journals have consistent editorial concepts and strategies, which include aims and scope, editorial planning, content verification process, and the role of the editorial board. A clear editorial policy enables publishers and societies to contribute to the development of authors and to publish articles that are relevant to target authors and researchers. Second, journals

should have clear guidelines for authors, authorship, and publication ethics. In particular, publication ethics principles should be presented in a separate section to ensure that their importance is not misinterpreted. Finally, publishers and societies should provide all the relevant information to authors and researchers from all over the world on an English-language journal website.

Conclusion

This paper analyzed the reasons for which 106 Korean journals were rejected after the CSAB review and classified those reasons into six categories with detailed explanations. Based on the reasons for rejection, including the quality of articles, journals' internationality, editorial policies, a limited number of articles for review, delayed publication, and too broad or narrow subject areas, it is recommended that publishers and societies should evaluate journals' performance with objective indicators and develop strategies to improve the quality of journals.

Furthermore, publishers and societies should learn about several factors that have a positive impact on the quality of articles and take steps to increase the visibility of articles to attract attention from authors and researchers across the world and to increase the opportunities for articles to be cited by other papers from a global perspective. Editors should expand editorial board membership to include international communities in order to increase the readership and the international appeal of their journals. On journal websites, authors should be able to identify clearly stated journal policies and relevant information, and publishers and societies should demonstrate journals' value and eligibility to be indexed by Scopus. The results of this study are expected to provide publishers and societies with critical guidelines to increase the likelihood of being indexed by Scopus.

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

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