

EDITORIAL

## Should scientists pay for publication fee from their pockets?

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### Introduction

Researchers and scientists are required as part of their job description to publish their work in peer-reviewed journals. In the past, traditional journals were publishing research for free and then sell these articles to libraries and individual users through subscription to journals by libraries and renting and purchase of articles by individual users.

However, in the past decade other system of publishing has emerge in which authors pay for publication of their work and the end-user accessing articles for free. This model of publishing termed open access, allow for easy and unlimited access of information through online publishing. Advocates for open access argue that since research work is funded using public funds, why should users pay for this information and knowledge? But then someone has to absorb the cost of publishing. This financial requirement to support publishing has become an incentive for lucrative business venture where none academicians can start publishing houses and charge researchers exorbitant fees (Article Processing Charge) to get their work published. Though this one-off payment may seem exorbitant for authors, it is cheaper for society who benefits from unrestricted access to information and knowledge. Then why would open access publishing become attractive to individual authors despite high publishing fees? The attraction is with the turn-around time between submission and articles appearing online which is short compared with traditional journal publishers. Authors by nature relish on seeing their work published; this is a non-monetary benefit in the lives of researchers as it improve their image, status and recognition by their peers and employers. Hence, the pressure to get published is high, leading researchers to submit their work to any journal regardless of quality, impact or reputation.

It is however, believed that open access will become the future feature of publishing in this digital age. This is supported by academic institutions around the world signing the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities which was issued at an international conference on October 22, 2003. Then, if open access is the future platform for distributing scientific information and knowledge, there has to be systems of quality assurance.

### Who should bear the costs of article processing?

In developing world where funding for research is scarce, article processing fees may not be budgeted for, leaving researchers to scrounge around for money to get their work published. In absence of available funds from their institutions or external funders to help get their work published some authors resort to using their personal money to pay for publishing charges. Is this a good thing? Though Suber (2013), writing for The Guardian newspaper pointed out that most peer-reviewed open access journals charge no fees at all, the practice may be wide spread in the third world than the western world. By pay for publishing fees from own pockets, researchers risk none declaration of their work

for publishing and none disclosure of possible intellectual property (IP) that may emanate from such work to Office of Research & Development. Another problems is that most of the open access journals that publish manuscripts within a week to four weeks after submission cast doubts about rigorous editorial and peer-reviewing culture familiar in scientific publishing. Nonetheless, some of these journals eventually transit into publishing high quality and high impact articles.

Lack of registry on research projects, both funded by universities and those which are not funded by institutions means that scientists can publish anywhere, even in journals with doubtful peer-reviewing culture. Suber (2013) further indicates that authors that pay from their pockets constitutes 6% of researchers that publish in open access. Notwithstanding this small percentage of scientists paying for publication fee from their pockets, it pose a challenge for institutions to know about research conducted in their institutions and where it is published. Botswana institutions, more specifically Botswana University of Agriculture and Natural Resources can overcome these by systematic monitoring of their research and also creating a fund to finance publication of such work in approved and recognized open access journals as part of its current transformation drive. The fund for financing publication in open access journals should be backed by open access policy and procedures that facilitates internal peer-review of manuscripts. This is because online and open access publishing is posed as the future feature of publishing information and knowledge and should still embrace the tradition of quality assurance accustomed in research publishing.

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### References

1. **Suber, P. (2013)** Open access: six myths to put to rest. <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education>

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