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Journal indexing - a critical reflection

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## Journal indexing – a critical reflection

Indexing was originally a way to make the research work more efficient through the access to select and reliable scientific information sources (journals) and to the research disseminated by these sources. However, indexing (especially in terms of international databases, such as Scopus, SciELO and Web of Science) became currently a seal of quality of scientific journals as well as the research published in them.

Therefore, indexing became a complex and sometimes polemic matter and became the target of several academic studies and also editors of journals and researchers. This is a recurrent theme when we address the issue of evaluating research institutions and individual researchers, because the journal in which a paper is published, the bases in which this journal are indexed and its impact on the academic community are, among others, indicators used to evaluate the quality and the productivity of institutions and researchers.

To be indexed in one of these bases is a relevant fact for a journal to get more visibility in terms of published research, while attracting prestigious scholars and measuring its impact on the area of research. According to authors, publishing in an indexed journal entails the possibility to get more readers and quotes of their papers, which increases the author's reputation in the field.

Nowadays, it is common to use quote and impact indicators produced by these indexers in order to evaluate researchers and institutions. These indicators are also present in the most important international university rankings. For this reason, several journals want to be a part of these databases, and researchers seek to publish their papers in journals that are indexed in the same databases.

However, as researchers in the area of administration, we must question: does the selection process of these indexers is in fact evaluating the quality of the journal as well as the published papers?

It is important, therefore, to discuss which would be the main criteria for a journal to become part of these indexers. The criteria used for indexing in the main databases, such as SciELO, Scopus and Web of Science, can be divided into four groups: regularity and punctuality; basic criteria for admission; editorial content; and reputation of the journal.

Regularity and punctuality of the journal is the first requirement to be evaluated by indexers, which is essential for the continuity of evaluations. Indexers verify in this criterion the capacity of the journal to publish in the established frequency (bimonthly, quarterly, etc.), with minimum delay and stable pattern of papers per edition.

The basic criteria for admission are the ones that, when not met by the journal, can interrupt the evaluation process only to be resumed later (after the journal meet these criteria). The main basic criteria for admission of both indexers are:

- (1) two years of existence (minimum recommended);
- (2) ISSN registration;



- (3) the content of the journal must be peer-reviewed and make publicly available the description of the reviewing process, the sort of peer-evaluation accomplished (open, single-blind, double-blind) and the steps of the process;
- (4) the publication of the complete text in English is recommended (or metadata at least – title and abstract);
- (5) international editorial convention:
  - the title of the journal has to be informative; abstract and title of the papers must be descriptive; complete bibliographic information in the references; authors' address and affiliation; and
- (6) to have a “code of ethics” and good practice in publication available on the website.

The code of ethics of the journal is one of the most important issues among the basic criteria and has to present information on important ethical issues (such as originality, plagiarism, collaboration/authorship, fraud, conflict of interest, corrections, disclaimer, among others) and the actions to be taken by the journal in case of ethical violation.

Regarding the editorial content, the indexers must evaluate the editorial policy of the journal, i.e., if the journal has a scope and a convincing editorial concept and if it is relevant for database users. One important issue to be evaluated is if the focus/scope of the journal is different from the ones of other indexed journals in the area and what is the differential of the journal; in other words, how the journal will add new information to the already established indexed group of journals. If the content approached by the journal is already been covered by other periodicals, it is likely that indexers will not accept the inclusion of this journal.

Another important issue related to the editorial content is the geographic diversity of authors, editors, and members of the editorial board of the journal. It is important to not only have geographic diversity, but that this diversity is aligned with the focus/scope and target audience of the journal. An international journal must:

- present a content that is interesting for the international scientific community (in alignment with the announced objectives and scope);
- present a diversity of authors, editors and members of the editorial board with representation from different regions and countries; and
- highly desirable publication in English.

It is important to remember that the focus of these indexers is on international journals. To put the word “international” in the title is not enough for a journal to fit in this category, i.e., it is necessary to have an alignment between editorial policy and actors (authors, editors, etc.), while being in accordance with the content of international journals. Local/regional journals (whose objective and scope are limited to the interest of a limited region or country; they publish mostly in a language other than English; present editors, authors and members of the editorial board in the country/region where the journal is published) are also accepted (more by Scopus and less by Web of Science), but these journals have to be excellent and must add new information to the content of indexers about a determined subject or to provide a specific regional perspective.

The last group of criteria is related to the reputation of the journal. In this requirement, the quotes of the journal are evaluated in order to determine the importance and influence of this journal in the literature that involves the theme. Based on the quotes, indexers will calculate the impact index (impact factor, CiteScore, H-Index, etc.) in order to verify the position expected from the journal

in relation to the other journals in the same area of knowledge. The record quote of authors, editors and members of the editorial board will also be analysed in order to determine if the journal is capable of attracting established researchers in the determined area of knowledge.

Considering these four groups of criteria, especially the last two ones, it is possible to notice that journals edited in Brazil can have difficulties to fit in these criteria. For instance, many journals have a regional or local focus, present high quality and could be indexed, but would have difficulties in meeting all the required criteria to be indexed.

A potential problem of this evaluation process is that discussion is no longer about the quality of the research and the relevance of the target audience; it is about fitting into the criteria established by indexers. It is important to be indexed, but such indexation does not ensure the quality of the published papers and their contribution for science.

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