Letter to the Editor

# Stressing the need for the pool of trained peer reviewers vs. authors' suggested reviewers

Nematullah Shomoossi[1], Zahra Shomoossi[2], Mostafa Rad[3*]

[1]Associate professor of Applied Linguistics, Department of English, School of Medicine, Sabzevar University of Medical Sciences, Iran
[2]Students Research Committee, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad, Iran
[3]Department of Nursing, Nursing and Midwifery School, Iranian Research Center on Healthy Aging, Sabzevar University of Medical Sciences, Sabzevar, Iran

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***Corresponding author:**
Mostafa Rad. Department of Nursing, Nursing and Midwifery School, Iranian Research Center on Healthy Aging, Sabzevar University of Medical Sciences, Sabzevar, Iran.
**Email:** mostafarad633@yahoo.com

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This letter comes to you hoping to emphasize how important trained peer reviewers are for the scientific workflow of academic journals. Normally, between 1 and 3 independent reviewers are required to peer-review a single manuscript. Most papers in Elsevier, for instance, receive feedback from three peer reviewers; shorter papers, e.g. brief reports or short communications, may emerge in journals only with the approval of two peer reviewers (1). In certain cases, editors-in-chief may choose to review some journal submissions (such as commentaries and book reviews) themselves and do without external peer reviewers. This is, however, considered as a subjective decision making, which may even lead to desk rejection in certain cases (2).

While being a peer reviewer is an accepted practice around the world, the problem emerges when journals cannot form a circle of reviewers for a timely and effective publication workflow (3) because professional peer reviewers are rarely paid for their service, and their contribution is voluntary depending on their working hours and free time (4). Journals seldom pay anything to the peer reviewers, although both subscription-oriented and open-access journals acquire money for article processing charges; the former from readers, and the latter from authors (5). Reviewers of book reviews, conference papers, and authors of invited editorials may be exceptions and receive certain payments from journals. However, almost none is paid for reviewing scientific papers.

Being undecided to act as unpaid peer reviewers or spend one's valuable time on their own academic development, most scholars develop excuses to avoid reviewing. The main reason reviewers decline to review journal manuscripts is principally a lack of time and interest; in addition, their contribution is not formally recognized by academic institutes (1); in fact, their service is underestimated. Critics argue that paying for reviews could increase the pool of reviewers, leading to the recruitment of those researchers who cannot afford to peer review for free. Payment is likely to increase their motivation to review meticulously, encourage the speed and quality of the reviews, and might even help develop the pool of retired researchers (3). In fact, if reviewers are employed, they will consider the task part of their duty to the academic community. This view, however, is not always welcome to journals as their employers.

A less expensive alternative is the strategy of suggesting peer reviewers by the authors of manuscripts upon submission. Journals ask corresponding authors to suggest peer reviewers because they are expected to know peers who could be interested in and qualified to review the submitted

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manuscript. This enhances the chances of finding peer reviewers. However, editors do not decide based only on suggested reviewers. For efficacy, some journals list qualifications for potential reviewers, but there are no fixed criteria; they are, however, expected to hold a Ph.D., be at the same rank, be interested in the manuscript submitted, and be a topic expert in that specialty (6). Ethically, potential reviewers are advised by journals to have no conflict of interest with the authors or the research reported. They need to assess the novelty, quality, impact, and importance of the research (7).

Despite its inefficiencies, peer review is a process that every researcher should contribute to. However, the practice of suggesting peer reviewers by the corresponding author of a manuscript has already become common. This strategy has been apparently effective so far, and most journals have efficiently survived the lack of interested peer reviewers in their attempt to catch up with branding in the global publication rivalry. However, research does not adequately report the drawbacks of this strategy. We intend to bring this issue to the fore and ask researchers to dwell on the issue in future studies. Alternatives such as the pool of researchers paid peer reviewing and inviting interested early career researchers to get trained, maybe other strategies to manage the publication workload. Also, proofreaders and academically oriented publication assistants may be recruited to conduct initial screening and help authors revise their manuscripts at reasonable costs.

**Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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