

CORRESPONDENCE

sities must be active participants in defining the reform process'. Rightly said. But an anecdote highlights a problem. Once a group of faculty happened to pour out their grievance before a VC. The VC immediately constituted a 'grievances committee' and appointed a chairman to look into the matter. The faculty again rushed back to the VC and said:

'Sir, what have you done?'. The members of the 'grievances committee' are the ones who are responsible for the grievances of the faculty and students, and the chairman of the committee is the one who is the most responsible.

So what is to be done? Let readers of *Current Science* be active participants in defining the reform process.

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1. Tauro, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2008, **94**, 839.
 2. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2008, **94**, 153–154.
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Access to science journals: Pros and cons

This is in response to the editorial 'Science Journals: Issues of Access' by Balaram¹. He has rightly brought out a serious issue confronting the scientific community (especially in the developing countries).

The rage for judging scientific output in terms of the number of publications has given rise to an explosion in scientific literature¹. The research potential and the scientific expertise of a researcher are measured by the number of research publications. More publications means more recognition, more fundings and faster promotion! Therefore, the insatiable demand for more publications in the scientific community is natural and is ever-increasing. I agree with Balaram when he says that with the publishers having caught the gravity of the situation, scientific publishing is increasingly becoming a profitable enterprise.

I am doubtful whether the criteria are helping in raising the research standard and increasing scientific performance. I suspect that they are also promoting plagiarism and resulting in sub-standard research publications. They have led to a phenomenal increase in the number of research journals and a substantial increase in their subscription rates in the recent past.

This may not be a problem for researchers in the developed countries. But it is really a matter of serious concern for researchers in the developing countries, including India.

For a responsible researcher or institution to ensure quality research and avoid repetition, it is essential to have access to the wide array of research journals and other publications in the concerned field globally. This necessity for access is becoming a matter of worry for researchers and institutions (with limited budgets) in the developing countries.

Balaram¹ has discussed two models – the 'reader pays' model and the 'author pays' model. In either case, the worst sufferers are researchers from developing countries.

In the 'reader pays' model for access to journals, the subscription rates are so high that most of the individual researchers in developing countries cannot afford these. So the burden falls on the institutional libraries which have tight budgets for purchasing publications. Thus, this profit-making practice (scientific publishing) is actually limiting the reach of research only to a privileged few. This is further widening the knowledge gap between the developed and the developing countries. This problem of access is more severe for the unpaid PhD scholars and independent researchers with no grants.

The 'author pays' model is also a matter of worry to researchers in developing countries. The costs to authors for publishing a single paper in a high-impact (open access) journal can be as high as US\$ 6000 (about Rs 2.5 lakhs)¹. This is highly unaffordable to most of the re-

searchers in these countries, including India and they find it difficult to submit manuscripts to such journals. This model has two implications.

1. The research (even of high quality) carried out in developing countries fails to get published in high-impact journals and hence does not get the attention of the global scientific community.

2. Such journals publish only those authors who can pay for the publication costs. So for their own survival, such journals may also publish sub-standard research of the paying authors.

In this connection, launching of an open access e-journal portal, Open J-gate (www.openj-gate.com) in 2006 at New Delhi is a good initiative². This will enable us to achieve the objective, namely science for all. Such initiatives will help in bridging the knowledge gap between the poor and the rich countries. It may also provide timely access to the research updates in a field.

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1. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2008, **94**, 837–838.
 2. Ratnakar, A., *Curr. Sci.*, 2006, **90**, 751.
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