

AN OVERVIEW OF OPEN ACCESS JOURNAL PUBLISHING IN SRI LANKA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SLJOL PROJECT

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Abstract

Open Access (OA) is seen as an unprecedented opportunity by developing countries in addressing issues related to publishing scholarly research findings and providing free access to them. Objective of the study is to present an introductory overview of the OA journal publishing movement in Sri Lanka. The study is based on a literature survey and secondary data collected from local and international directories and listing services (i.e., SLJOL, DOAJ,) that either host and/or provide authoritative lists of OA journals. Collected data were processed and analyzed using MS-Excel spreadsheet, are presented through tables and graphs. The study findings reveal that one hundred and thirty-one (131) OA journals are published in Sri Lanka on Sri Lanka Journals Online (SLJOL) platform. Further, the study found that academic institutes publish most of the OA journals (55%), followed by professional associations (36%) and research institutes (4%). As far as the subject-wise distribution is concerned, Science, Technology, and Medicine (STM) field dominates the OA journal publishing with 58.01 % journals fall under the category. Among them, medicine and health sciences have the highest percentage of journals (55.26%), followed by natural and physical sciences (23.68%) and agriculture (21.05%) journals. Highest number of medical and health journals (78.57%) are published by professional associations whereas the vast majority of (78.04%) social sciences and humanities journals (including journals on management studies) are published by academic institutes. Vast majority (70.99%) Sri Lankan OA journals are published biannually. This study recommends measures for Sri Lankan OA journals to reap the benefits of OA publishing including publishing as a continuous volume and issue throughout the year irrespective of the frequency of their print counterpart, securing regular financial support from the government of Sri Lanka is necessary for the sustainability of OA journals published in Sri Lanka, and establishing strong OA policies and OA mandates at institutional and national level.

Keywords: Open Access; Open Access Journals; Open Access Publishing; Scholarly Publishing

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Introduction

Availability and access to research information is essential for the development process of any country. However, there are two major problems faced by developing countries in this regard. First, the inability to afford subscriptions to journals has limited access to the global research output, which are critical to the national development (Harris, 2018; Murray & Clobridge, 2014; Nobes, 2016). Second, the inability to integrate national research output into the global knowledge pool which results the invisibility of local research. Open Access (hereafter referred to as OA) has been seen as an unprecedented opportunity by developing countries to address the above problems (Nobes & Harris, 2019).

After considering the definitions of three influential public statements: the Budapest Open Access Initiative, the Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing, and the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities, Suber (2012) summarizes the basic idea of OA as “providing online access to scholarly publications and making that access free of charge and without most copyright and licensing restrictions”.

There are two (02) strategies to achieve OA to research information: (i) self-archiving of refereed journal articles in open electronic archives, and (ii) publishing articles in open access journals (hereafter referred to as OA journals) (Budapest Open Access Initiative, 2001). The first strategy is also known as ‘Green route’ whereas the second is referred as the ‘Gold route’ to OA (Singh, 2016). OA journals are peer reviewed journals made available free of charge to the public through the Internet. Unlike the business publishing model, end-users are not charged to access articles in OA journals, instead alternative strategies such as direct author or funding agency fees, are used to cover the costs for publication and distribution (Dulle & Minishi-Majanja, 2011). OA journals show a rapid growth over the past few years, where the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) lists over 9.5 million articles from over 20,000 OA journals from 136 countries.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

Purpose of this study is to identify the open access journal publishing initiatives in Sri Lanka with special reference to Sri Lanka Journals Online (SLJOL) project. Specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- (i) To investigate the open access initiatives in Sri Lanka with special reference to open access journal publishing
- (ii) To identify the characteristics of open access journals published in Sri Lanka, and
- (iii) To recommend strategies to empower and sustain open access journal publishing in Sri Lanka

Materials and Methods

The present study is largely based on secondary information and data sources. The literature survey and the secondary data collection were carried out during September – October 2023.

Initially, the literature survey was carried out by using Google Scholar and Google search engines to answer the first specific objective of the study. Google Scholar was selected as it focuses only on scholarly literature such as journal articles. Google search engine was selected as it indexes gray literature such as reports, working papers, white papers, etc., that are not usually covered by Google Scholar. Following keywords and keyword phrases were used interchangeably:

“scholarly journal publishing”; “scholarly publishing”; “journal publishing”; “scientific journals”; “open access”; “open access journals”; “open access initiatives”; “Sri Lanka”; “Sri Lankan”

A preliminary reading of the selected texts allowed the identification of citations for other relevant works. Findings of the literature survey are summarized and presented according to the research objectives.

Secondly, local as well as international directories and listing services (i.e. SLJOL, DOAJ, BanglaJOL, NepJOL) that either host and/or provide authoritative lists of OA journals were studied to collect data on OA journals. International directories and listing services such as Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) were used to obtain comparative data related to OA journals. Locally, Sri Lanka Journals Online (SLJOL) were used to extract journal-level data on OA journals published in Sri Lanka. Systematic manual data collection from OA journals were conducted by accessing their homepages through the links provided in these listing services. Collected data were processed and analyzed using MS-Excel spreadsheet, are presented through tables and graphs.

Results and Discussion

Open Access Publishing in Sri Lanka

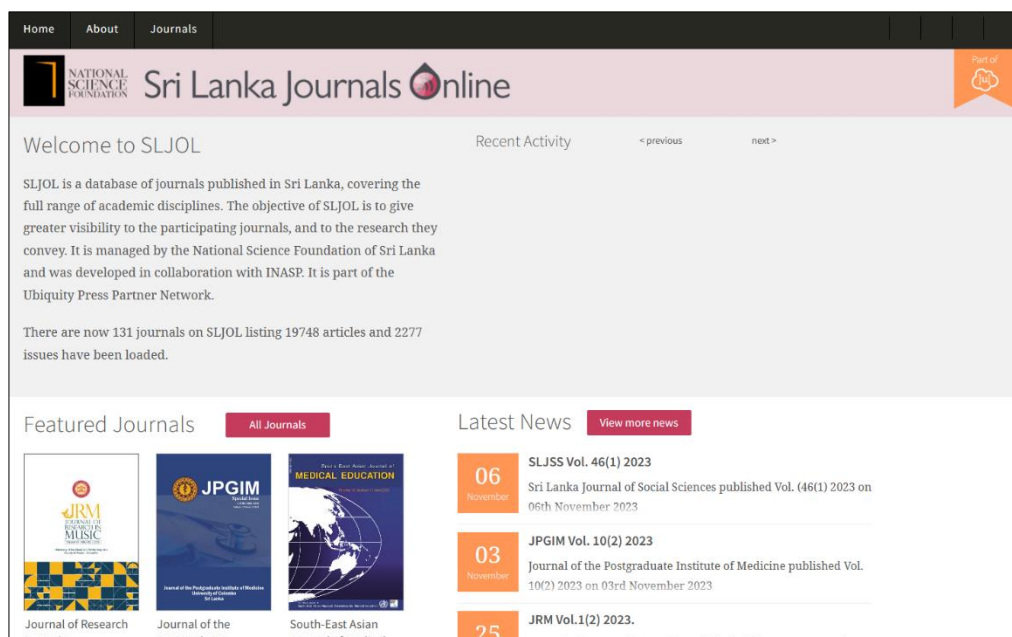
Scholarly Publishing in Sri Lanka dates as far back as 19th century. Progress in scholarly publishing was closely related to the historical development of learned societies in the country (Yapa, 2011). The Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society is the first scholarly journal which was published in 1845. The first scientific journal to be published in Sri Lanka was the Medical Miscellany, founded in 1853 (Senadhira, 1975). According to Yapa (2011), there was a significant increase in the publication of scholarly journals in Sri Lanka from 1970 onward. As of 2010, there were one hundred fourteen (114) scholarly journals published in Sri Lanka and highest number (34%) of them were humanities and social sciences related, followed by medical (28%), natural and physical sciences (24%) and agriculture (14%) related journals (Yapa, 2011). Majority of these scholarly journals were published by universities, professional associations, and research institutes in Sri Lanka and virtually there were no commercial publishers engaged in scholarly journal publishing in the country.

OA is relatively a new concept for Sri Lanka. National Science Foundation (NSF), mandated to serve and strengthen the Science and Technology sectors in Sri Lanka, has played a key role in OA movement in Sri Lanka. Initiated in 2006, NSF actively supported the establishment of OA repositories in universities, research institutes and other organizations in Sri Lanka as a part of the National Digitization Project (Perera, 2013a, 2013b). Sri Lanka Journals Online (SLJOL) project was initiated in 2008 with the support of UK based International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP). Journals OnLine (JOL) project of INASP aims to improve the accessibility and visibility of developing country research and uses the ‘Open Journals System’, an open-source software created by the Public Knowledge Project (PKP). So far, 131 local scholarly journals have been hosted on SLJOL by providing access to tables of contents (TOCs), abstracts and full text on the Internet (Fig. 1). SLJOL also serves as a gateway to Sri Lankan OA journals. Journals are selected for inclusion on SLJOL using the following criteria:

- a) Journals are scholarly in content and contain original research,
- b) Journal papers are peer-reviewed and quality controlled,
- c) Journals should provide all content (tables of contents, abstracts, and PDFs of full-text) in electronic format, and

d) Journals should be published within Sri Lanka.

Figure 1: SLJOL Homepage



INASP has also supported two other JOL projects in South Asia namely BanglaJOL of Bangladesh and NepJOL of Nepal (Table 1).

Table 1: Journals Online Projects (JOL) of INASP in South Asia

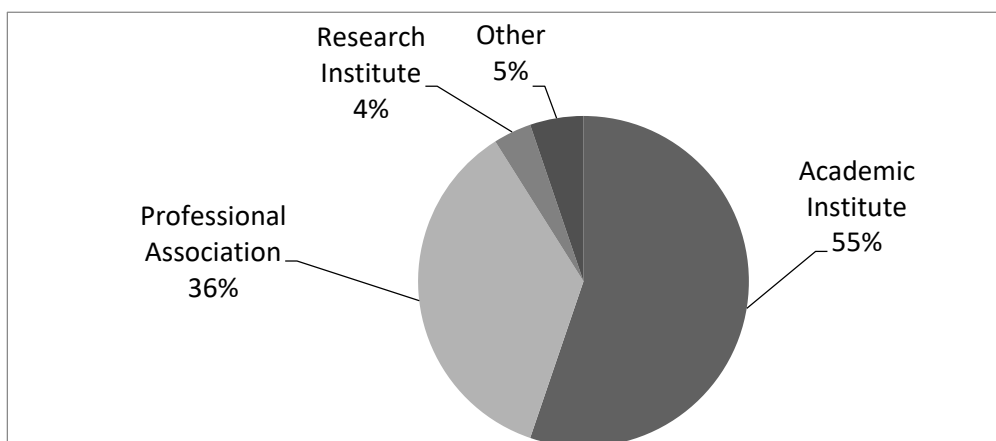
JOL Project (Abbreviation, Initiated in)	No. of Journals	No. of Articles
Bangladesh Journals Online (BanglaJOL, 2007)	166	22,509
Nepal Journals Online (NepJOL, 2006)	365	37,085
Sri Lankan Journals Online (SLJOL, 2008)	131	19,748

Open Access Journals in Sri Lanka

Since the first Sri Lankan OA journal was published in 2008 (Perera 2013a, 2013b), the number has increased up to one-hundred and thirty-one (131) journals with access to nearly twenty thousand (20,000) full-text articles. The characteristics of these OA journals are presented and discussed here.

Academic institutes and professional associations are the major publishers of OA journals in Sri Lanka (Fig. 2). They occupy ninety-one percent (91%) of OA journals published in the country. Here, academic institutes incorporate universities and other higher education institutes. Professional associations, also known as learned societies, publish journals related to their academic disciplines or professions. A small percentage of journals is published by research institutes, government departments, and non-governmental organizations. It is interesting to note that virtually there are no commercial publishers engaged in OA journal publishing in Sri Lanka. These findings tally with previous studies (Yapa, 2011) which identified academic institutes, professional organizations and learned societies as the major contributors of scholarly journal publishing in Sri Lanka.

Figure 2: OA Journal Publishers in Sri Lanka



Overall subject distributions of Sri Lankan OA journals are displayed in Table 2. According to available data, Science, Technology and Medicine (STM) fields dominates the OA journal publishing in Sri Lanka as most journals (58.01%, n=76) fall under that category. Among the STM journals, most of them (55.26%; n=42) are medicine and health related, followed by natural and physical sciences (23.68%, n=18) and agriculture (21.05%, n=16) journals. However, these findings contrast with the findings of Yapa (2011) who revealed that the highest number of print journals published in Sri Lanka were humanities and social sciences related. These findings confirm that while humanities and social sciences related journals dominate the traditional print journal publishing industry, science and technology related journals dominate the OA journal publishing in the country.

Table 2: Subject Distributions of Sri Lankan OA Journals

<i>Subject Category</i>	<i>No. of OA Journals</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Medicine & Health Sciences	42	32.06%
Social Sciences & Humanities	41	31.29%
Natural and Physical Sciences	18	13.74%
Agriculture	16	12.21%
Multidisciplinary	10	7.63%
Architecture	4	3.05%
Total	131	100%

Table 3 offers an overview of the publisher-wise distribution of OA journals. Accordingly, the highest number of medical and health journals (78.57%, n=33) are published by professional associations. Another few titles (16.66%, n=7) are published by academic institutes. The vast majority of (78.04%, n=32) social sciences and humanities journals (including journals published on management studies) are published by academic institutes. The majority of (77.77%, n=14) natural and physical science journals are also published by academic institutes. Vast majority (90%, n=9) of multidisciplinary journals as well as more than half of (68.75%, n=11) agriculture related journals are also published by academic institutes. In this way, professional associations in Sri Lanka publish more OA journals on medicine and health sciences while academic institutes publish more OA journals on other subject areas.

Table 3: Publisher-wise Distribution of OA Journals

<i>Subject Category</i>	<i>Publisher-wise Distribution of OA Journals</i>	
	<i>Publisher</i>	<i>N (%)</i>
Medicine and Health (42 Journals)	Academic Institute	7 (16.66)
	Professional Association	33 (78.57)
	Other	2 (4.76)
Social Sciences and Humanities (41 journals)	Academic Institute	32 (78.04)
	Professional Association	5 (12.19)
	Other	4 (9.75)
Natural & Physical Sciences (18 Journals)	Academic Institute	14 (77.77)
	Professional Association	3 (16.66)
	Other	1 (5.55)
Agriculture (16 Journals)	Academic Institute	11 (68.75)
	Professional Association	2 (12.5)
	Other	3 (18.75)
Multidisciplinary (10 journals)	Academic Institute	9 (90)
	Professional Association	1 (10)
Architecture (04 journals)	Academic Institute	3 (75)
	Professional Association	1 (25)

Table 4: Frequency of OA Journals Published in Sri Lanka

<i>Subject Category</i>	<i>Publisher-wise Distribution of OA Journals</i>	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>N (%)</i>
Medicine and Health (42 Journals)	Annual	7 (16.66)
	Biannual	27 (64.28)
	Continuously published online	1 (2.38)
	No information	2 (4.76)

	Quarterly	5 (11.9)
Social Sciences and Humanities (41 journals)	Annual	3 (7.31)
	Biannual	33 (80.48)
	No information	1 (2.43)
	Quarterly	1 (2.43)
Natural & Physical Sciences (18 Journals)	Annual	3 (16.66)
	Biannual	12 (66.66)
	Quarterly	3 (16.66)
Agriculture (16 Journals)	Annual	3 (18.75)
	Biannual	9 (56.25)
	Every two (02) years	1 (6.25)
	Three (03) issues per year	1 (6.25)
	Quarterly	1 (6.25)
	No information	1 (6.25)
Multidisciplinary (10 journals)	Biannual	8 (80)
	Quarterly	1 (10)
	Three (03) issues per year	1 (10)
Architecture (04 journals)	Biannual	4 (100)

As far as the frequency of OA journals published in Sri Lanka (Table 4) is considered, vast majority (70.99%, n=93) of them are published biannually. Twelve percent (12.21%, n=16) of journals publish only a single issue per year (annually). Only eight percent (8.39%, n=11) of OA journals are published quarterly. The subject-wise analysis reveals that more than half of the medical and health related journals (64.28%, n=27) are published biannually, whereas only eleven percent (11.9%, n=5) of medical journals are published quarterly. Another sixteen percent (16.66%, n=7) of medical journals publish only a single issue per year. The vast majority of (80.48%, n=33) of social sciences journals are published biannually. Majority (56.25%, n=9) of agriculture journals are published biannually, whereas another few titles (18.75%, n=3) are published annually. The majority (66.66%, n=12) of natural and physical science journals are also biannual publications.

Table 5: Other Characteristics of OA Journals Published in Sri Lanka

<i>Article Processing Charges (APC)</i>			
APC Available N (%)	APC Not Available N (%)	No information N (%)	Total N (%)
3 (2.29)	123 (93.89)	5 (3.81)	131 (100)
<i>Immediate vs. Delayed Open Access</i>			
Immediate OA N (%)	Delayed OA N (%)	No information N (%)	Total N (%)
124 (94.65)	0 (0)	7 (5.34)	131 (100)
<i>Journal's Copyright Policy</i>			
Publisher Retains Copyright N (%)	Author Retains Copyright N (%)	No information N (%)	Total N (%)
54 (41.22)	52 (39.69)	25 (19.08)	131 (100)
<i>Peer-review Process</i>			
Peer-reviewed N (%)	Partially Peer-reviewed N (%)	No information N (%)	Total N (%)
124 (94.65)	7 (5.34)	0 (0)	131 (100)
<i>Language of Publication</i>			
English Articles Only N (%)	Trilingual N (%)	No information N (%)	Total N (%)
126 (96.18)	5 (3.81)	0 (0)	131 (100)

Further, the study analyzed data related to the article processing charges (if any), immediate open access to the articles published, copyright policy, peer-review process and language of publication of Sri Lankan OA journals (Table 5). According to the findings, only very few journals (2.29%, n=3) charge any article processing fee from authors whereas vast majority of journals (93.89%, n=123) journals do not charge any article processing fees from authors. At the same time, almost all the journals (94.65%, n=124) offer immediate open access to full-text of articles without any delay. In many cases, publishers retain the copyright of the works published in their journals (41.22%, n=54) and authors are required to get the permission from the journal editor or publisher to reproduce their work. Almost equal number of journals (39.69%, n=52) allow authors to retain copyright of their works through Creative Commons licenses. Study findings further revealed that almost all the OA journals published in Sri Lanka undergo some form of peer-review. In few journals (5.34%, n=7) articles only submitted to the peer-review section of the journal will undergo the peer-review process. Almost all the OA journals published in Sri Lanka (96.18%, n=126) accept articles only written in English, while only very few journals accept articles written in local languages (Sinhalese and Tamil language) in addition to English language articles.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Present study was conducted with the objective of presenting an introductory overview of the OA journal publishing in Sri Lanka special reference to SLJOL project. Major conclusions of the study are as follows:

(i) Majority of Sri Lankan OA journals are published either biannually or annually and these are closely associated with the publication schedules of their print counterparts. In other words, majority of OA journals published in Sri Lanka are confined into the conventional model that publishes issues at fixed intervals.

(ii) Virtually none of the OA journals published in Sri Lanka charge any article processing fee from authors due to the non-profit motives of them. The costs associated with publishing and hosting OA journals are managed with funding and/or technical support from local and international agencies.

(iii) Almost all the OA journals published in Sri Lanka accept articles only written in English, while only a very few journals accept articles written in local languages (Sinhalese and Tamil language). However, in Sri Lanka, most of the humanities and social sciences journals are published in local languages. The study makes following recommendations for Sri Lankan scholarly journals to reap the benefits of OA publishing:

(i) OA journals in Sri Lanka should be published as a continuous volume and issue throughout the year rather than confined into conventional model that publishes issues at fixed intervals. So that these journals can rapidly disseminate research findings using the advantages provided by OA journal publishing platforms.

(ii) OA is always associated with some essential costs such as publishing and hosting them. In absence of funding sources or/ technical support services, OA journals in Sri Lanka are vulnerable to be discontinued. Therefore, securing regular financial support from the government of Sri Lanka is necessary for the sustainability of OA journals published in the country.

(iii) Accepting and publishing articles only written in English hinder the global visibility to the local research. Therefore, journals that publish articles written in local languages (Sinhalese and Tamil languages) should be made available online through OA platforms.

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