

## Evaluating quality of Arab journals of special education

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### Abstract

The quality of the research can be measured by a set of standards and indicators that focus on the idea of research originality, the depth of discussion, the literature analysis techniques, and the quality of research instruments. This research aims to evaluate the quality of Arab journals of special education (AJSEs). Five AJSEs were evaluated, all specializing in special education in the Arab world. The AJSEs were issued in Egypt, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. A checklist of 20 indicators was developed and applied to these journals. Results revealed that 5 indicators were highly met, 11 indicators were moderately met, and 4 indicators were low met in AJSEs. The results also indicated a difference in the quality indicators achievability (QIA) according to the journal's name. The QIA in International Journal for Talent Development, and Journal of Special Education and Rehabilitation was considerable. While, the QIA of the Saudi Journal of Special Education and Arab Journal of Disability and Talent Sciences was moderate, and it was low in Journal of Special Education.

**Keywords:** Arab journals of special education, indicators, quality, scientific publishing, special education

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## 1. Introduction

Scientific publishing (SP) is an indicator for societies' advancement and the ability to achieve sustainable development. It is one of the indicators for measuring the level of scientific production, the requirements for knowledge exchange, and the enrichment of international knowledge. Therefore, the SP has no value as it is not reviewed and edited. The globalization of knowledge has enhanced international competitiveness in the SP. This competitiveness improved publishing according to the impact factor and citations for research that was published in peer-reviewed journals. The SP has become a pillar in the classification of countries, which depends on the quantity of published research. It also allows researchers to establish a relationship with scholars from different countries. On the other hand, the SP represents the most scientific activities for university faculty. It is one of the criteria for academic promotion or renewal of their contracts (Aalst, 2010). The contribution of the faculty and scholars to SP is one of the criteria used in the international ranking of the universities (Kivinen et al., 2017; Orbay et al., 2020). In this regard, the SP has acquired 40% in the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) and 30% in the World University Ranking (El Dahshan, 2018).

### 1.1. Journals Quality

The revolution of information and communication technology has brought about an increase in global information exchange in the knowledge fields. This revolution reflected positively on the libraries and scientific research centers that made journals and books available on the Internet and scientific databases (Kulaib, 2007). Journals thus began to shift from hard copy publication to digital access or soft copy publication, which made it easier for researchers to access these journals and conduct research. Scholarly journals are one of the tributaries of human knowledge, and journals more broadly are a repository of intellectual production; therefore, without the continuous accumulation of scientific production, it is difficult to develop the community of science and knowledge (Hawala, 2012). On the other hand, journals are a scientific platform for the exchange of opinions and act as the most effective channels of communication between researchers (Kelly et al., 2014). Due to the quality of scientific content, commitment to the scientific method, and coverage of knowledge fields, the confidence of these journals vary widely.

In the Arab context, the SP in the Arab journals should be reconsidered. The majority of Arab research and journals suffer from international isolation and are not recognized in international scientific databases (Al-Salem, 2012). The reasons for this isolation may be due to the absence of an institutional framework for Arab research centers and the deterioration of ethical values in research preparation (Al-Taie, 2012). Perhaps the scientific gap that emerged with the developed world contributed to the weak contribution of the Arab world to international research production (Alhidabi & Aljaji, 2016). The mediocre research quality in the Arab world was thus further affected by limited and decreased spending on research (Al-Badayna, 2008). To overcome international isolation, Arab universities and research centers must adopt international standards and indicators. This will contribute to an improvement in the quality of Arab journals and research.

The quality of the research can be measured by a set of standards and indicators that focus on the idea and originality of the research, the depth of discussion, literature analysis techniques, and the quality of research instruments. The Web of Science has set standards for preparing a manuscript and adopting the citations method for the journals indexed by Clarivate. In addition to adopting one method for citations (Burnette, 2015), these standards are also included in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (Hunsley, 2010).

There is an urgent need for special education researchers to publish high-quality research, especially

because we know that the special education research receives distinct attention among parents, educators, decision-makers, researchers, and journal editors and reviewers (Cooper & Hedges, 2009). Although there is an international movement towards the application of evidence-based practices that include indicators of research quality, those responsible for special education journals have yet to adopt any of these indicators (Talbot et al., 2017). The availability of these practices and indicators may motivate researchers to improve their research output. Through the implementation of evidence-based practices, it has been shown that many of the remedial interventions in special education are poorly implemented. Therefore, there is a need for indicators to review the quality of special education research. The different learning environments of individuals with disabilities, the diversity of disability categories, and the multiplicity of research designs in special education may explain why such indicators exist (Odom et al., 2005).

### **1.2. Related Research**

The Journals of special education depend on the quality indicators used in reviewing research particularly like those used to evaluate qualitative research designs, correlational designs, single-case designs, and experimental and quasi-experimental group designs (Odom et al., 2005). A meta-synthesis based on the qualitative research approach can be used in special education research to put forward new theories (Hott et al., 2014). In this regard, King et al. (2020) revealed an increase in the number of meta-analyses and systematic reviews published in journals of special education during the period of 2004 to 2016. In contrast, there are few Arab research studies in special education that use qualitative research designs (Ialhano, 2016). Internationally, qualitative scholars over the past four decades have developed a list of standards and procedures for assessing the contributions of qualitative research to the scientific landscape (Kozlesk, 2017). Consequently, journal editors use standards and indicators that apply in the reviewing process of most manuscripts (Davies, 2000). The availability of these standards and indicators allows editors and reviewers of journals to provide feedback to the authors (Talbot et al., 2018).

Standards and indicators are one of the main issues in total quality. It is a specification that must be met in any system to obtain a good product. Thus, the absence of these standards and indicators from the AJSEs contributes to its lack of recognition by international scientific databases and institutions responsible for monitoring citations for research, journals, and scholars. Also, the lack of standards and indicators in the AJSEs may reduce their scientific credibility among Arab and non-Arab researchers interested in publishing in special education. In this regard, Talbot et al. (2018) recommended further research to develop indicators and guidelines in the field of special education.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Research Purpose**

This research aims to determine the QIA in AJSEs. For this purpose, the following questions were sought:

1. What is the QIA in the AJSEs?
2. Does the QIA differ due to the journal's name?

### **2.2. Research Design**

A Bibliometric Descriptive Approach was used. This approach is based on an analysis of the contents of the website of AJSEs. This method provides quantitative data that may benefit researchers and the editors-in-chief of these journals.

### 2.3. Research Sample

Five of the AJSEs were included in this research. The scope and aims of AJSEs in the field of special education in the Arab world. These journals were published in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Egypt. Table 1 shows the bibliographic data of AJSEs.

**Table 1. Bibliographic Data of AJSEs**

<b>N</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>ISSN</b>
1	Saudi Journal of Special Education (SJSE)	Saudi Arabia	1658-7154
2	International Journal for Talent Development (IJTD)	Yemen	2415-4563
3	Journal of Special Education (JSE)	Egypt	2356-7996
4	Journals of Special Education and Rehabilitation (JSER)	Egypt	2314-8608
5	Arab Journal of Disability and Talent Sciences (AJDTS)	Egypt	2537-0480

Table 1 shows some bibliographic data of AJSEs. The JSE, JSER, and AJDTS are issued by universities or commercial corporations in Egypt. While, SJSE is published by Saudi Association for Special Education and King Saud University. The IJTD is published by International Association for Talent Development and University of Science and Technology in Yemen. Therefore, the scope of AJSEs covers the categories of special education.

### 2.4. Data Collection Tool

To achieve the aims of this research, a list of 26 indicators was developed to assess the quality of the AJSEs. This list was developed after reviewing the websites of Arab educational and psychological journals and international journals of special education. In addition, the standards of Arab and international databases were reviewed, including Web of Science (WOS), Scopus, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Arab Impact Factor (AIF), and Arab Citation and Impact Factor (ARCIF).

### 2.5. Psychometric Characteristics

To verify the face validity of indicators list, five editors-in-chief of Arab educational journals reviewed the first version of the list. Based on their comments, the final version of the list consisted of 20 indicators. On the other hand, Inter-rater reliability was used to assess the reliability of this list. The indicator list was applied to three Arab educational and psychological journals. Quality indicators were applied to these journals by the author in this research and his colleague from the Department of Psychology at Sultan Qaboos University, Oman. The mean of the agreement between them reached 86% using Cooper's test. These indicators were included in a checklist.

### 2.6. Data Collection Procedures

To collect information on AJSEs, Arab scientific databases were checked. The E-Marefa, Dar Almandumah and Shamaa are the largest scientific databases in the Arab world. These Databases include bibliographical information about of special education journals. The website of AJSEs and Arab

Citation and Impact Factor, such as AIF and ARCIF were also checked. According to these procedures, five journals of AJSEs were identified.

### 2.7. Data Analysis

The QIA was measured by the following criteria: Yes (1) or No (0). The following criterion was adopted to judge the QIA in the AJSEs: low (0% to 33%), moderate (34% to 66%), or high (67% to 100%) (duTreil et al.,2005). Based on the purpose of this research, descriptive statistics were used. The current research used percentages and frequencies.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. The Results of the First Question: What is the QIA in the AJSEs?

To answer this question, descriptive statistics were used. The percentages and frequencies were presented in Table 2.

**Table 3. The QIA in AJSEs**

N	Indicators	Frequency	Per Cent	Level
1	Online availability and access	3	60%	Moderate
2	Journal's website	2	40%	Moderate
3	International Standard Serial Number (ISSN)	2	40%	Moderate
4	Digital Object Identifier (DOI)	3	60%	Moderate
5	Journal's affiliation (Publisher)	5	100%	High
6	Journal's editorial board	3	60%	Moderate
7	Journal's advisory board	1	20%	Low
8	Publication instructions	4	80%	High
9	Publication ethics	3	60%	Moderate
10	Review policies	3	60%	Moderate
11	Intellectual property rights	3	60%	Moderate
12	Volumes and issued	2	40%	Moderate
13	Publication frequency	1	20%	Low
14	Geographical distribution of research	3	60%	Moderate
15	Journal's scope and aims	5	100%	High
16	International abstracting and indexing	1	20%	Low
17	Regional abstracting and indexing	5	100%	High
18	The manuscript tracking system	3	60%	Moderate
19	International impact factor and citations (Scopus & WOS)	1	20%	Low

20	Regional impact factor and citations index (ARCIF & AIF)	5	100%	High
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Table 2 shows that the QIA in the AJSEs was as follows: 5 indicators were highly met, 11 indicators were moderately met, and 4 indicators were low met in Arab journals.

### 3.2. The Results of the Second Question: Does the QIA differ due to the journal's name?

To answer this question, descriptive statistics were used. The percentages and frequencies were presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. The QIA According to Journal's Name**

N	Name	Country	Frequency	Per Cent	Level
1	SJSE	Saudi Arabia	13	62%	Moderate
2	IJTD	Yemen	19	90%	High
3	JSE	Egypt	6	29%	Low
4	JSER	Egypt	16	76%	High
5	AJDS	Egypt	12	57%	Moderate

Table 3 shows that the QIA according to journal's name was as follows: two journals had a high achievability, two journals had a moderate achievability, and one journal had a low achievability.

## 4. Discussion

The current research aimed to evaluate the AJSEs by determining the QIA. Therefore, the results will be discussed in terms of this achievability.

### 4.1. The High Quality Indicators

The results showed that 5 indicators had a high QIA in the AJSEs. These indications were related to the journal's affiliation, publication instructions, journal's scope and aims, regional abstracting and indexing, and regional impact factor and citations index. The AJSEs are published through different organizations: the JSE and the IJTD are published by universities, the SJSEs is published by a specialized professional association affiliated to King Saud University, and the JSERs and AJDS are published by commercial corporations. The diversity of publishers may contribute to the high level of achievability. Diversity may create a kind of competition and achieve quality indicators in the AJSEs. Accordingly, the competitive advantage of research reflects the journal's reputation and distinguishes it from other journals in academic publishing.

The results showed that the publication instructions' indicator was available at a high level, with 80% of the AJSEs including instructions that clarify the terms and requirements of receiving research, reference documentation, and citations. The results also indicated that the published research was consistent with the scope and aims of the AJSEs. In addition, all AJSEs are indexed in Arab scientific databases, such as Dar Almandumah Company and E-Marefa Company. This indexing helped monitor citations for published research in the AJSEs, as well as impact factor, which led to the emergence of Arab initiatives, such as the AIF supported by the Arab League, and the ARCIF is sued by E-Marefa database in Jordan. ARCIF and AIF are both responsible for calculating the impact factor of Arab journals.

These initiatives provide a quantitative and qualitative assessment to determine the journal's quality and impact factor. Furthermore, the Arab initiatives were also a reaction to international institutions that were not interested in calculating the impact factor for Arab journals. The reason may be that Arabic is the publishing language for most of the research published in Arab journals. Musa and Al-Sayed (2016) indicated that there were publishing obstacles for the journals indexed in Clarivate and Scopus, such as the fact that they do not recognize Arabic as a language for scientific publication. In this regard, the Arabic Citation Index (ACI) initiative may make Arabic journals and research available to researchers from all over the world. The ACI was designed with funding from the Egyptian government through a cooperation agreement with Dar Almandumah and Clarivate Company. Based on this agreement, Arab journals and research will be hosted on the Web of Science platform, placing them on the international scientific research map. Perhaps this initiative is based on the recommendation of El Dahshan (2018), who stressed the need to establish an Arab scientific organization to judge the quality of research production and to create an Arab impact factor for research and journals published in the Arabic language. On the other hand, Al-Zoubi and Al-Zoubi (2019) recommended that journal's editorial boards adopt standards and indicators to improve the quality of research published in Arab educational and psychological journals.

#### *4.2. The Low Quality Indicators*

The results showed that four indicators had a low QIA in the AJSE were low. These indications were related to international advisory board, publication frequency, international abstracting and indexing, and international impact factor and citations. In regard to the SJSE, there is no information available about the advisory board members on the journal's website, but their names were included in each issue published online. In terms of nationality, 50% of the advisory board are Saudi Arabian, 25% are Arabs, and 25% are international. Meanwhile, the percentage of Yemen is on the advisory board of IJTD is 25%, which the rest are from Arab or foreign countries. In the context of Egyptian journals, it was found that 50% of the advisory board members of AJDTS are Egyptian and the rest are from Arab countries only. In the JSER, 71% are from Egypt and Saudi Arabia and the rest are from Arab countries only. Unfortunately, there is no information about the SEJ on the Website of Ain Shams University. In sum, the majority of advisory boards of AJSEs are made up of people from Arab countries or other nearby nations. In other words, since the international advisory board is one of the criteria for the international recognition of these journals, there should be international diversity in the advisory board members of AJSEs.

According to the journals' publication frequency indicator, IJTD is the only one that clarifies publishing frequency on its website. The rest of AJSEs follow an open policy for submission and publication of manuscripts at any time. More precisely, data regarding the frequency of publication (monthly/quarterly) are not available for AJSEs, lacking the kinds of publication schedules that are recognized in foreign and some Arab journals. Yan et al. (2010) indicated that the low and unclear publication frequency may negatively affect the journal's impact factor: a one to two-year delay of publishing may reduce the value of information in this research. According to the Scientific Citation Index, there is a relationship between journal impact measures and the number of journal issues per year (Moed, 2005). Chen (2019) found that the average number of issues per year was 10.95 and 5.18 in Science and Social Citation Index journals, respectively. In their research, Tort et al. (2012) excluded a number of journals indexed in WOS because the publication frequency was low. Consequently, the number of issues increases the citations and journal impact factor. For this reason, AJSEs requires a clear vision by showing the publication frequency on their websites.

The results also presented a low level for AJSEs in regard to international indexing and abstracting, as

well as international impact factor and citations. The IJTD is the only one indexed in EBSCO and Google Scholar. No information is available on the website of any other AJSEs regarding indexing in international scientific databases. Furthermore, AJSEs have no international impact factors and citation reports. This disappointed result also applies to other Arab journals in the psychological and educational science except for a journal published by Zayed University which is included in the Scopus database. Despite the criticism and controversy among theorists about criteria for evaluating academic journals, these criticisms are directed towards the criterion for the number of citations (PLoS Medicine Editors, 2006), and the current reality confirms that the impact factor is used as a main criterion for measuring the quality of academic journals (Tort et al., 2012). Even the international ranking of universities and researchers has become dependent on the impact factor and citations (Abbott et al., 2010), which has contributed to an increase in international competition between institutions and scientific publishing centers to improving academic publishing in their journals. In the Arab world, Nassar (2015) indicated that the contributions of scientific research to the global knowledge society are still low. These low contributions may be due to a number of obstacles that limit the publication of scientific research in Arab journals (Mouloudj & Mouloudj, 2018), or the difficulty of Arab scholars fulfilling standards and instructions for publishing in journals indexed in the WOS (Al-Maghdwi, 2019). In this regard, Khalifa (2017) concluded that some Arab journals are not qualified for inclusion in Scopus and Clarivate databases because these journals do not meet criteria of Scopus and Clarivate databases. These research results provide evidence that AJSEs may also not meet the criteria of Scopus and Clarivate databases.

#### *4.3. The Moderate Quality Indicators*

The results indicated that 11 indicators had a moderate QIA in AJSE. Table 2 shows that some indicators dealt with technical aspects, such as electronic access, website design, ISSN, DOI, issues and volumes, and a manuscript tracking system. It can be seen that IJTD is distinguished from other AJSEs in regard to its availability of these technical aspects, but all of the journals have weak standards related to the ISSN and archiving of issues and volumes. A perusal on the website of the ISSN Organization reveals that AJSE have ISSN, but the names of these journals are shaded and unclear to non-Arabic speakers. This may cause international researchers looking to publish their research to lose confidence in AJSEs. The results indicated that two AJSEs do not have DOI. DOI has become one of the most internationally recognized standards because it is easily accessible for research published online (Fasae & Oriogu, 2018). In this regard, Tiliut (2016) emphasized that DOI provides a framework for managing scientific content and e-commerce. Therefore, the achievability of DOI in AJSEs is a guarantee for preserving automated copyrights. This DOI helps researchers to access digital copies of research, even if AJSEs ceases publishing. Since 80% of AJSEs are open-access journals, the availability of DOI gives the journals scientific value and international respect. Journals with DOI gain the trust of researchers and scientific databases. Gorraiz et al. (2016) concluded that DOI is available at a high percentage in all disciplines included in the Scopus and Clarivate databases.

The AJSEs must redesign their websites so that they are available in Arabic and English and are easy to access. Moreover, the availability of an electronic manuscript tracking system has become a criterion for evaluating journals. Its availability gives researchers confidence in the journal's discretion and authenticity. Unfortunately, 90% of AJSEs depend on email to contact the authors and reviewers. In some cases, the manuscript tracking system is found, but unfortunately, it is not effective on the websites of AJSEs. AJSEs can benefit from the Public Knowledge Project (PKP) or Open Journal Systems (OJS). PKP/OJS has been proven to allow easy access to research knowledge at the international level, improve the quality of journals, and provide free access to research (Owen & Stranack, 2012), this free project has been commonly used by IJTD and Arab and international journals. On the other hand, AJSEs

can subscribe to ScholarOne Manuscripts, issued by Clarivate. This program is an electronic system that manages the process of submissions, tracks the status of manuscripts, and facilitates the reviewers' evaluation of manuscripts (Fox & Burns, 2015).

Regarding numbers and volumes, it has been noted that AJSEs publish volumes annually; however, the method used for issuance numbers differs from the system followed in international journals. For example, most international journals publish one volume that contains four issues per year, but in the case of AJSEs, there is no fixed number of issues per year, with some issues reaching 40 or more, lacking any adherence to the internationally recognized standards. The situation is even worse in some Arab educational and psychological science journals, where the number of issues can reach 150 or more and lack a volume to contain these numbers. The editorial boards of AJSEs may have special perceptions in publishing volumes and issues, but these bureaucratic research traditions contributed to a publication frequency of only 20% in the current research.

Table 2 also indicated that there were two journals of AJSEs that did not clearly show the policies related to publishing ethics, manuscript review, and intellectual property rights. The other three AJSEs listed these policies on their websites. AJSEs must clarify on their website the ethical standards for publishing by adhering to the instructions of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). The COPE is a nonprofit organization that seeks to improve scientific publishing through a set of ethical standards aimed at the publisher, the editorial board, reviewers, and authors. Fazly and Sadeghi (2012) warned against ethical misconduct of faculty at an Iranian university or the negative practices of publishing research in an Iranian journal, both of which are bad practices according to the recommendations of COPE. On the Arab level, Al-Khateeb (2010) showed that special education research faces problems related to research methodology, the low relationship of research with special education practices, and the absence of scientific research ethics. Ialhano (2016) revealed the low prevalence of qualitative research methodology in Arab special education research, demonstrating how the authors of most published research follow the quantitative approach.

Table 2 shows there were two journals with problems related to the geographical distribution of published research. Furthermore, in one of these two journals, it was noted that most of the research has been published by authors from the same country as the journal. In general, the AJSEs and the Arab journals in the educational and psychological sciences still suffer from a lack of polarization to international research and authors, which may be due to the limited availability of an English version of the journal's website or weak contribution from the editorial and advisory boards in promoting Arab journals. Regarding the editorial boards of AJSEs, it was noted that the boards of some journals do not specialize in special education. In addition, the majority of the editorial boards do not have an academic or research influence at the Arab or international levels, and some members do not have a doctorate, and the low level of citations for their research in Google Scholar or Scopus as well. After reviewing previous research, Rowley et al. (2020) indicated that the editor's/editorial board's reputation and research review quality influence a researchers' decision to publish with a journal. Therefore, because the quality of research published in AJSEs depends on the expertise of editorial board members, the director boards of AJSEs are required to reconsider the editor/editorial board in order to have an international presence among special education journals. Most of AJSEs research was duplicated and consumed internationally and did not constitute a qualitative addition in special education.

The AJSEs and Arab journals in education and psychology disappointedly follow a special ritual in writing research elements; in other words, the guidelines and style of writing manuscripts are the same as writing master's and doctoral theses. In these journals, the theoretical literature and previous studies take up more space than a discussion element. In fact, Al-Amin (2016) addressed the issue of the lack of

knowledge contributions from Arab educational research due to the social and institutional traditions followed by the editorial board of these journals in reviewing and publishing research. The case with Chinese journals is no better than AJSEs: research published in Chinese educational journals also faces problems in formulating theoretical literature and recommendations (Zhao et al., 2017). Internationally, Chamberlin (2008) concluded that issues related to gifted education are neglected in multicultural education journals.

In the Arab world, there are scholars in special education who have made contributions through the dissemination of books and research. These emerging AJSEs could make agreements with special education scholars inside or outside the Arab world. For example, because Jordan is the home of Arab expertise in special education, perhaps Jordanian scholars could become invested as editor/editorial board members of AJSE. It was noted that some Jordanian scholars in special education are listed in AJSEs as members of the advisory board only.

## 5. Conclusion and Suggestions

Based on results of this research, the AJSEs have positive quality indicators. Consequently, these journals are a candidate for entering the international competition in the future. In order to achieve these aspirations, AJSEs must reconsider their websites and their editorial and advisory boards, subscribe to international citation institutions and organizations, and index and abstract these journals in international scientific databases. The AJSEs must reconsider their method of writing research content to address contemporary issues and trends in special education. Therefore, the aim of this research stems from both a personal and national Arab desire to further develop and advance our journals. Future research can examine the quality of Arab special education research and identifying trends in special education research during the past years.

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