

Does Scopus Put its Own Journal Selection Criteria into Practice?

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Introduction

Scopus has been one of the main abstract and citation databases introduced by Elsevier in 2004 to the scientific area. With the multidisciplinary and international coverage aspects, it is one of the largest databases of peer-reviewed literature in the fields of science, technology, medicine, social sciences, arts, and humanities. There have been several literature studies assessing different aspects of Scopus since the very beginning. The following consists mainly of a description of Scopus, comparing it with the other databases, from the point of usability and accessibility, evaluations regarding the number of citations, and so on. Although there have been many studies about content evaluation and comparisons with other databases, to our knowledge no study has been published focusing on the journal selection criteria of Scopus. The main goal of this study is to evaluate Scopus journals and draw a picture regarding the quality of the journals indexed in Scopus. The two research questions of this study are:

- Do the journals indexed in Scopus match with the Scopus indexing criteria?
- Is there any contribution of the journals that does not fulfil the criteria of Scopus with respect to diversity of authors, institutions and countries as well as internationality of referees, editors and authors?

Methodology

The universe of the study consists of the 2013 Scopus journal list downloaded from SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) on September 18th, 2014. Two groups of countries that have more than 1,000 journals and less than 100 journals in Scopus were left out of the content of this study because of their projected effects on the sample. As a result, 6,151 journals from 23 countries constituting the sample frame were sampled with the systematic sampling method with a rate of 1:30 and 203 journals were chosen for the sample in proportion to 23 countries' journal counts in Scopus.

These 203 journals were evaluated according to the criteria outlined in Table 1, which is mainly based

on Scopus journal selection criteria.¹ The contextual criteria were removed because of the requirement to have a comprehensive knowledge of related field. Furthermore, revised Scopus criteria and some new added criteria are marked with grey in Table 1.

Table 1. Criteria selected and used to evaluate Scopus journal content.

| Criteria categories | Criteria |
|---|--|
| Minimum technical criteria (Pre-selection conditions) | Peer-review content and have a publicly available description of the peer review process |
| | Have an International electronic Standard Serial Number (eISSN) as registered with the ISSN International Centre |
| | English abstracts and titles |
| | Regular publication |
| | References in Roman script |
| | Publicly available publication ethics and malpractice statement |
| Journal policy | Editorial policy available |
| | Type of peer review |
| | Reviewer list available online |
| | Diversity in geographical distribution of editors |
| | Volume of editorial board |
| | Diversity in geographical distribution of authors |
| Journal standing | Citedness of journal articles in Scopus |
| Publishing regularity | No delays or interruption in the publication schedule |
| Online availability | Full journal content available online |
| | Journal website available |
| | English language journal website available |
| General information about journal | Country of the journal |
| | Number of issues per year |
| | First publishing year of the journal |
| | Journal back issues available on the journal website |

Findings and Results

There are only 13 journals providing all of the minimum technical criteria of Scopus. The majority of the journals (190) did not meet at least one criterion. Six journals fulfilled only one criterion of Scopus. Journals and their fulfilment of evaluation criteria are shown in Figure 1. The baseline of the radar graphic (Fig. 1) was created by using “yes”

¹ <http://www.elsevier.com/online-tools/scopus/content-overview#content-policy-and-selection>

answers to the criteria. We found that 32% of journals did not have an International Electronic Standard Serial Number available (eISSN). Most of the journals (82% and 69% respectively) did not match the criteria of reviewers list being available online and having publicly available publication ethics and malpractice statement. Journals were successful about applying the criteria of available references in Roman script, regular publication and English abstracts and titles.

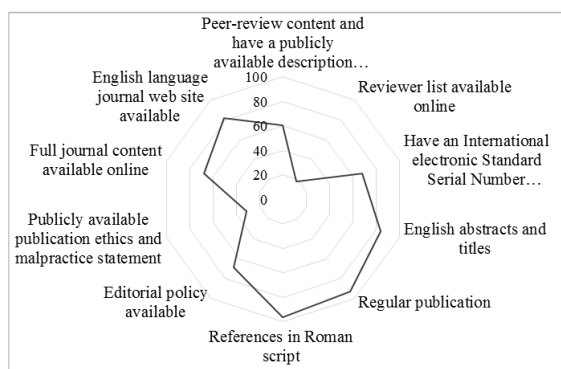


Figure 1. Radar graphic presentation of journals' fulfilment of evaluation criteria.

The evaluation criteria were divided into five classes in this study. These classes are accessibility, peer-review process, policy issues, internationalization and citation levels of journals. The detailed evaluation of each criterion is found in the following sections of this study.

We decided that accessibility on the web, regular publication and references in Roman script consist of the main components of the accessibility criteria in our study. Fifty-one percent of journals in our sample have had all the issues since the launch of their websites and had websites that included full contents of the issues (titles, abstracts, full texts, etc.). Almost all journals had references in Roman script (97%) and most of the journals had English titles/abstracts (84%) and English websites (82%).

The criteria of peer-review process consists of a journal having detailed information about how it is managed and its peer-review board list being available online. We found that 40% of the journals did not have any information on their websites about the peer-review process. Those that did, 73% did not have any information about how their peer-review processes were managed (e.g., double blind, single blind and so on). Only 18% of journals published a list of their reviewers. Under these circumstances, it was hard to determine the diversity of reviewers.

Having accessible publication policies and publicly available publication ethics and malpractice statements were regarded as policy issues. We found that 32% of the journals did not have any editorial policy on their websites. In addition, 68%

of the journals did not have any publicly available publication ethics and malpractice statements. Because policy issues were parts of Scopus's minimum criteria, it was expected that journals without these policies would not have passed the preliminary evaluation. However, all these journals have been indexed in Scopus over the years.

The diversity of authors and the editorial board were important for Scopus' evaluation team. We evaluated the diversities as part of this study. Twenty-nine percent of the journals did not have a list of editorial board on their websites. The median for geographic diversity of editors was about 6 within the rest of journals. Eight journals had editors from more than 20 countries. A journal had editors from 53 different countries, while 21% had editors from only one country.

Author diversity is also important for internationalization of journals. We calculated the number of countries by using author affiliations of the last 10 published articles/reviews of each journal. Nine journals did not give any country information for their authors. The median for geographic diversity of authors was 4 within the rest of the journals. Authors were from only one country in 26% of the journals.

Citations are essential for indexed journals within citation databases, as almost all the performance evaluations rely on citations. We evaluated the citation levels of journals by using total cites (three years) indicator of SCImago database. The median number of citations was calculated as 26. Fourteen journals did not have any citations during the three-year period. Six journals had over 1,000 citations.

Conclusions

Citation databases are important for authors, decision-makers, institutions, countries and others. Therefore, it is vital to index high-quality journals for them. Citation databases have strict selection criteria to evaluate journals before indexing to achieve their aims. The criteria of databases are generally based on journal policy, regularity of publication, diversity and so on. We evaluated the journal selection criteria of Scopus and checked the extent of their implementation within this study.

According to the results of our study, the publishers, editors and Scopus should strive to enhance quality. On Scopus' side, Scopus must put the selection criteria into practice strictly and control indexed journals on the aspects of these criteria. Because of the huge competitive environment in the journal market recently, Scopus as well as other publishers of commercial citation databases should consider quality issues more importantly than commercial concerns. A comparative study on journal selection of citation databases may be the continuation of this study.