



Original Article

Challenges of Medical Journal Publication: A Case of TMSS Medical College Journal in Northern Bangladesh

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Abstract: Bangladesh experiences unique challenges in publishing medical research in peer-reviewed and high-impact international and national journals. These challenges arise from several factors, including a lack of healthcare professionals, limited research funding, and a lack of mentorship for aspiring researchers. Additionally, the language barrier, particularly with English as the predominant language of scientific communication, poses a significant obstacle. Consequently, Bangladeshi researchers often struggle to meet the rigorous standards and competitive landscape of international journals. TMSS Medical College Journal (TMCJ) Bogura, Bangladesh has also been experiencing some challenges since it was started in July 2013. Therefore, based on the TMCJ own experience, this qualitative study was designed to explore the challenges of medical journal publication. Study participants were journal editors, advisors, editorial board members, and authors of TMCJ. The journal and participants were selected purposively. This study found a lack of quality research papers for publishing every issue of the journal due to a lack of well-written methodology, analysis, findings, proper citation, and language. One of the journal editors mentioned that “We are not receiving a sufficient number of manuscripts, and those we do receive are not publishable”. By overcoming these barriers, not only TMCJ, but also Bangladesh can enhance global medical knowledge, training on medical writing, and improve healthcare outcomes for its populations.

Keywords: Challenges, medical journal, publication, TMSS medical, Bangladesh

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Introduction: Scientific validation and dissemination of research discoveries in medical sciences are based on publishing in prestigious journals. However, it is challenging for researchers to achieve this desired recognition. However, competition and problems in scientific publications are soaring every day¹. Despite significant improvements in healthcare infrastructure and research capacity, Bangladesh experiences unique challenges in publishing medical research in peer-reviewed and high-impact international and national journals. According to BMDC (2023), 175 medical journals were published in Bangladesh but only five journals are recognized by the international journal indexing and ranking authorities Scopus, Scimago, Web of Science, and PubMed². In Bangladesh, there are a smaller number of papers produced by the medical faculty. In most cases, it is done as co-author to meet only their career purpose. These hurdles come from a combination of factors, including lack of research funding, mentorship for aspiring researchers, rigorous process of peer review, and validity of research manuscripts^{3,4,5}. Scarcity of peer reviewers who are experts in their respective fields, methodically evaluate submissions, assessing the methodology, results, and conclusions presented^{5,6}. Lack of originality, being overworked, and having poor writing abilities for aspiring researchers⁷⁻⁹. Consequently, Bangladeshi researchers often struggle to meet the rigorous standards and competitive landscape of international journals. To improve this scenario and support Bangladeshi health researchers, TMSS Medical College started its own official journal "TMSS Medical College Journal (TMCJ)". However, it has also been experiencing some challenges since the journal started in July 2013. Therefore, based on the TMCJ experience, this study was designed to explore the challenges of medical journal publication. This study aimed to explore the challenges of medical journal publication of TMCJ in Bogura, Northern Bangladesh.

Materials and Method: This study was done on 26 participants at TMSS Medical College, Bogura between 07 November to 07 December 2023. This study utilized qualitative study design using a mix of key informant

interviews (KIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). We conducted two FGDs with authors and journal editorial board members from TMCJ. Of ten KIs were done with the senior level editors, advisors, editorial board members, and authors of TMCJ who have at least 10 years of experience in the respective field of medical journal publication.

Two FGDs were took place in a safe venue at TMSS health sector premises where respondents found the venue safe and favorable to share their perspectives. The KIs took place in-person at their own office and online. Online interviews were conducted using WhatsApp platform following the given appointments.

Purposive sampling was used for both KIs and FGDs. However, homogenous demographic characteristics were considered to recruit the participants for the FGDs. Similarly, KI respondents were selected purposively from the respective organizations and institutions primarily working in medical journal publications. We continued recruitment until thematic saturation was achieved. We developed open-ended KI and FGD guidelines. The guidelines were translated into Bangla and then back-translated into English. Both the guidelines were pretested with the targeted audience.

Data was collected by the researchers themselves. The interviews were tape-recorded and extensive notes were taken. The data analysis was done through data familiarization, identification of emerging codes and themes. All emerging themes were clustered and plotted in multiple data display tables. Then, compiled data brought about reportable findings. Data triangulation was done using the narratives of KIs, FGDs, and secondary literature review.

Ethical Considerations: The ethical clearance was approved by the Ethical Review Committee of TMSS Medical College. Informed consent was obtained before the start of the research. Participants were given detailed information on the purpose of the study, benefits, and risks of this study.

Participation was completely voluntary and had right to withdrawal at any point in time possible. **Limitations of the study:** This is a small and single journal based qualitative study. It needs to be validated through further large-scale studies by undertaking with a large number of participants and more duration of time shortly.

Results and Discussion:

Characteristics and major responses of the participants: The majority of the participants were senior-level medical doctors and involved with the process of TMSS Medical College Journal (TMCJ) publication. The age of the participants was 40-65 years old. In addition to that, there were some other professionals such as dental surgeons, nurses, rehabilitation professionals, psychologists and professionals from a general background. The following important aspects are highlighted (Table 1).

Motivation towards research and publication: The motivations for research and publication among medical doctors in Bangladesh are complex, and influenced by different factors such as personal, professional, and systemic factors.

Personal factor: The majority of the participants mentioned that they are overburdened with patients. They do not find research stimulating and enjoyable as it seems complex, a lengthy process, and has less financial benefits.

Professional factor: The majority of the participants were involved in journal publication only for professional growth. They conducted research and publication only for promotion purposes. Sometimes, published articles as a co-authors where they have little contribution. Although, many reputed peer-reviewed journals do not accept passive contributions as an author¹⁰. This increasing trend of inappropriate authorship due to the university set criterion on a number of publications for the researcher's career evaluation¹⁰.

Theme	Major Subtheme	Frequency of KII Responses (n=10)	Frequency of FGD Responses (FGD=2; n=16)
Motivation towards research and publication	Lack of motivation	5	2
	No reward for research work	4	1
	Only for promotion	8	2
Knowledge on drafting and submitting manuscript	Lack of knowledge on conducting research	7	1
	Fear of manuscript writing and submitting to journal	5	1
Number and quality of submission	Receiving a smaller number of manuscripts	7	2
Language barrier	Poor English writing	6	2
Peer review process	Scarcity of reviewer	8	2
	No or less financial benefit	2	1
Funding for research and publication	Lack of research fund	6	2
	Publication fees	2	0
Mentorship	Lack of mentorship	6	2
Visibility and Impact	Open access, indexing and impact of Journal	4	1

Institutional factor: Institutes also played a crucial role by providing infrastructure, funding, mentorship, and training opportunities for health professionals to conduct research. This can significantly increase research engagement and output. Research suggested similar findings of playing significant role of institutions¹¹. TMSS Medical College authority took several initiatives to motivate its staff to conduct and publish research. They had motivation towards research and publication but could not put dedicated time to conduct research. An author of TMCJ mentioned that

"We have interest and feel to conduct and publish our research work but we could not continue due to lack of understanding the pathway of research publication, we actually feel it is a difficult procedure and less rewarding" (KII-7).

Knowledge regarding drafting and submitting manuscripts:

This study explored the knowledge gap in writing and publishing research articles. The lack of emphasis placed on research during graduate and postgraduate degrees, as well as relying on others to finish the research work, were among the many causes that were noted. Preparing a manuscript was found one of the complex procedures which require strict and standard prescribed rules to follow therefore, authors find it difficult. Several studies also reported that scientific writing is a complex task ¹². One of the authors reported:

"We actually feel that this pathway is really difficult and afraid to start preparing manuscript and publishing our work that is why most of the time we dependent on others". (KII-7)

Number and quality of submission

This study found lack of quality research papers for publishing each and every issue of the journal. Quality research paper includes well written methodology, analysis, findings, proper citation and language. One of the journal editors mentioned that

"We are not receiving a sufficient number of manuscripts, and those we do receive are not publishable that is why we have to spend more time to make the manuscript publishable" (KII-01, 02).

Language barrier: Language was identified one of the important barriers. Scientific writing etiquette was not maintained in most of the manuscripts resulting editors of the journal experienced challenges. Three journal editors reported that

"We have to do a lot of work after receiving a manuscript even we have to rewrite the manuscript to publish our journal within the publication deadline". (KII-2, 3,4)

Peer review process: Peer review is an intricate and important process which experiences challenges due to lack of good reviewers. This study explored significant challenge of having good number of reviewers. This study found difficulties in finding external reviewers. As it is scholarly and less paid work, sometime it is been very challenging to collect reviewed manuscript within the

stipulated time frame. One of the editors mentioned

"We rarely receive feedback on time from reviewers, we have to give reminder again and again" KII-2.

Funding for research and publication:

Limited institutional and national research fund was identified by some of the respondents which leads to a smaller number of academicians and clinicians involved in research. There are few researchers conduct and publish research with their own fund. Although, TMSS medical college has its own fund to encourage academicians and clinicians to conduct research. Fund scarcity was identified by other studies done in similar settings in India ⁶.

Lack of mentorship: This study found lack of mentorship opportunities in this research and publication field. Senior academicians and researchers were key persons to improve research skills among young researchers. This is an effective way to build research capacity which was found in different part of the world ⁷.

Open access, indexing, and impact of journals: open access, indexing, and impact of journals play an important role, and a number of receiving quality research articles depend on these factors. Some authors reported that visibility of our work is an important factor to publish research article.

Interventions for removing barriers:

Associated factors of receiving less paper for publications were more emphasis given on serving patients and students, lack of interest in research, limited research funding, inadequate research training, and a lack of mentorship for young researchers. The potential interventions for removing barriers were enhance research funding, strengthen research training programs, promoting English language proficiency and foster mentorship opportunities.

Conclusion and Recommendations: To address these challenges, there is a need for targeted interventions to enhance research funding, strengthen research training programs, and foster mentorship opportunities. Furthermore, promoting English language

proficiency and encouraging collaboration with international researchers can facilitate the dissemination of Bangladeshi medical research on a global scale. Lack of quality research papers is one of the major challenges for publishing medical journal. By overcoming these barriers, Bangladesh can enhance its contribution to the global body of medical knowledge and improve healthcare outcomes for its population.

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Author Contributions: 1st author Md. Matiur Rahman conceived the idea, planned the research design, did the literature review and checked the manuscript meticulously. 2nd author Md. Kaoser Bin Siddique did the research design, conducted the KIs and FGDs, gathered and analyze data, wrote the manuscript. 3rd author Mohammad Mahbub Ur Rahim, guided the data collection process and checked the manuscript meticulously.

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