

INCREASING THE VISIBILITY OF LOCAL RESEARCH: THE JOURNALS ONLINE PROJECT AT INASP

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Abstract

The development of the Journals Online project at INASP is explained. The aim of the project is to increase the visibility of the research produced in developing and emerging countries. This has been achieved by creating websites on which the content of local journals is hosted. The visibility of the research was measured by recording the number of journals hosted, articles, full text articles and visitors. A questionnaire survey was conducted of changes in levels of indexing and qualitative comments from editors were assembled. It was found that the number of journals and articles on the websites was increasing and the number of article views was high, thus indicating that the research was being used by researchers from all over the world.

Keywords: Journals Online; JOLs; INASP; PERii; training workshops; local research.

1. Introduction

The role of the Internet in the dissemination of scholarly research is now accepted, and research is easily available from offices, libraries and Internet cafes. However, there is still a significant divide between the experiences of those in the more affluent, developed countries, and those in less affluent, less developed countries. Computers and Internet connectivity are less accessible even within university environments and ability to pay for journal subscriptions is limited. The International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP), through the Pro-

gramme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERii) has done much to support access to academic research from international publishers, but perhaps less well known is its support for the dissemination of research and journals produced within the less developed countries. While some of the local research is published in international journals, much of it is of more interest and relevance to a local or regional audience and is published in indigenous journals which are usually print-only, and have a very limited circulation.

2. Methodology

The INASP Journals Online (JOLs) project supports peer-reviewed journals from developing and emerging countries to publish their journals online, giving researchers access to local knowledge and the opportunity to contribute their own articles. The aim is to increase the visibility of research from these countries while also increasing the capacity of journal editors to manage their journals in the online environment.

The methodology for the INASP Journals Online Project has evolved through time as experience was gained from the initial African Journals Online project (AJOL) which began in 1998 with simple HTML pages on the INASP website. Most of the journals did not have PDFs of their full text and many were not willing to make their content available for free, so a document delivery service was created to disseminate the full text freely to developing countries and for a small charge to developed countries [1].

A partnership with the Public Knowledge Project (PKP) in Canada in 2004 allowed the journals to be transferred to the Open Journal System (OJS). INASP developed the software to suit the needs of the multiple journal AJOL website thus providing a much more sophisticated, but low cost and low bandwidth website which improved the user experience as well as providing a more robust database for the service. As a result of the AJOL developments, PKP went on to produce new versions of their software which incorporated the multiple journal site and a number of the other innovations originally developed for AJOL.

In accordance with INASP's mandate to develop sustainability and local capacity, AJOL was moved to Africa in 2005 and it is now managed by a not-for-profit trust in South Africa. It has gone from strength to strength with more than 340 journals from 25 countries on the site in March 2009.

Two evaluations [2] were carried out on AJOL and the experience gained was used in the development of an Asian JOL, but after a lot of discussion from the interested parties, the project was approached differently. Instead of having one

large site incorporating journals from many countries, individual country sites were developed and then combined into a search portal called AsiaJOL.

A very important part of the JOL concept was the support provided to local editors through a series of in-country workshops. The first workshop discussed the issues of online publishing and then editors were encouraged to form their own online strategies and promotion plans. The second workshop was usually held after the JOL had been established and it addressed some of the production quality issues, but mainly focussed on training the editors to load their own content onto the website. The third workshop brought together the same editors to discuss the functions of an editorial office and went through the full online peer-review process using the JOL website. In some instances, the second and third workshops were combined.

INASP also entered into an agreement with CrossRef to allow all articles published on the JOLs to have digital object identifiers (DOIs) assigned to them.

The increase in the visibility of the journals was measured by recording

- the number of journals, articles and full text included on JOLs
- the number of open access full text article views from the JOL systems;
- the number of visitors (from Google Analytics);
- the number of countries from which the visitors come (from Google Analytics);
- changes in level of indexing (from a questionnaire survey)
- qualitative comments from the editors.

3. Results

The following Asian JOLs were set up: Vietnam (VJOL) and Nepal (NepJOL) 2006, Bangladesh (BanglaJOL) 2007, Philippines (PhilJOL) and Sri Lanka (SLJOL) 2008 [3].

The Asian JOLs now include 119 journals with 5 591 articles of which 75% are available as open access full text (to March 2009) (Table 1). There have been 1 341 553 views of full text articles and 686 517 visits from countries all over the world.

Twenty-eight editors (25%) responded to the questionnaire on changes to indexing. There was a 33% increase in the number of journals included on an index after joining a JOL and 22% of the respondents reported joining other indexes as a result of attending a JOL workshop (Figure 1). Qualitative comments from editors support this:

Joining PhilJOL and DOAJ before that has resulted in wider coverage and readership. This helps the journal get included in indexing services.

Journals Online	No of Journals	No of issues	No of articles	No of FT articles	% of articles FT	No of FT views	No of visits	No of Countries from which visitors came
Bangladesh	26	125	1 554	1 293	83	333 297	185 326	200
Nepal	32	95	1 444	962	67	357 243	179 630	210
Philippines	27	76	673	502	75	303 718	187 141	195
Sri Lanka	11	51	447	419	94	20 373	6 340	128
Vietnam	23	142	1 473	1 010	69	326 922	128 080	178
Total	119	489	5 591	4 186	75	1 341 553	686 517	

Table 1: Summary of statistics for Asian Journals Online.

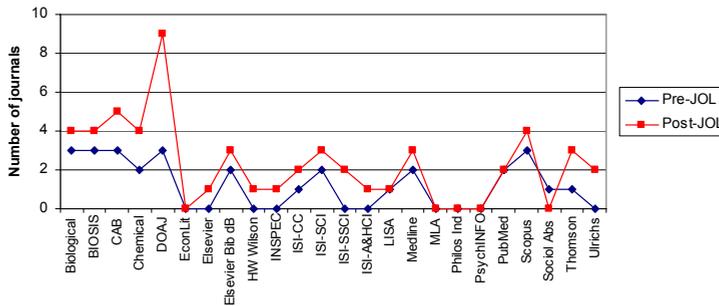


Figure 1: Changes in indexing for journals joining the JOL project.

BanglaJOL is used as an example to illustrate the increase in article views over time (Figure 2) and the same trend is displayed by each of the other JOLs [4].

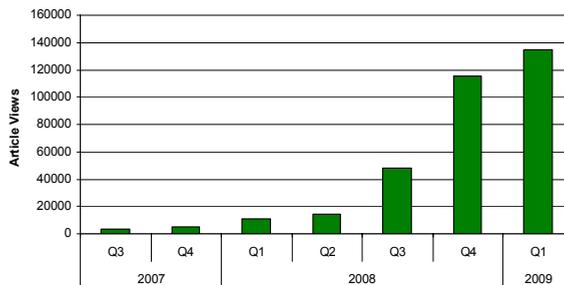


Figure 2: Article views for BanglaJOL.

A purely qualitative measure of the change in visibility for the journals was obtained from comments by the editors in their correspondence with INASP. A small selection of these is given below:

It has been an excellent year for us. Till today we have received 47 manuscripts from authors around the world – highest ever in our 15 years’ of publishing! (from a journal on BanglaJOL)

I must thank you for your support of our journal through PhilJOL. As soon as we got into PhilJOL, the number of submissions has increased significantly. The increase is so significant, that I am considering suggesting to our publisher that we increase the number of issues per year from 2 to 3. The quality of the submissions has also improved! I know that this improvement is partly due to our visibility in PhilJOL.

I am very pleased with PhilJOL; our journal and the health information contained therein are suddenly much more visible online than ever before. This availability would not have been possible or easily achievable by a developing country publication such as ours were it not for the generous support of INASP. You are levelling the playing field. Many thanks.

The grouping of the separate Asian JOLs was accomplished in 2008 by the development of the PKP harvester which gathers the metadata from the individual JOL databases and brings them together on AsiaJOL where they can be searched individually or together, thus allowing researchers to find more material which is relevant to their specific region. This part of the project is still being developed (Figure 3) [5].



Figure 3: AsiaJOL search portal.

4. Discussion

The Asian JOLs have been successful in that they have allowed the journals to obtain a web presence quickly, easily and at little cost without the need for technical expertise or their own server. We have intentionally kept the JOL websites very simple so that they are more easily downloaded in bandwidth poor countries. However, there is still some work to be done in reducing the size of the PDFs of the articles and introducing HTML versions of the articles to make them even more accessible.

Being part of a community of journals from a country has been very important because it makes them easier to find and increases the visibility of the journals. Some of the journals did have websites before joining the JOL, but because they were often part of their university websites or were not Dublin Core compliant, they were not easily found. Journals are still joining all of the JOLs as they realise the advantages the sites can offer.

The number of visitors to the sites and the large number of countries from which they come has shown that the formation of the JOLs has contributed to the increase in visibility of the locally produced research.

The workshops have been an important part of the methodology, because they have allowed the editors to meet and discuss issues which they might not have been aware of before. The results of the survey on levels of indexing showed that as a result of attending workshops and being part of a JOL, many journals are now included in more indexes, thus increasing their visibility. Face-to-face training has helped the editors to use the system, although bandwidth issues have meant that the use of the full peer-review system has not been as rapid as we would have hoped.

The search portal of AsiaJOL has been slow to start, and this part of the project is still being developed but has the potential to be an important research tool which may eventually allow JOL databases from Africa, Asia and Latin America to be linked and searched in the future.

Notes and References

- [1] AJOL <http://www.ajol.info/>.
- [2] ROSENBERG, D. *African Journals OnLine (AJOL): An Internal Evaluation, 2000-2002*. Oxford: INASP, 2003. CUMMING, S.D. *African Journals OnLine (AJOL) Evaluation Report 2003-2005*. Oxford: INASP, 2006.
- [3] VJOL <http://www.vjol.info/>. NepJOL <http://www.nepjol.info/>. BanglaJOL <http://www.banglajol.info/>. PhilJOL <http://www.philjol.info/>. SLJOL <http://www.sljol.info/>.

- [4] More information about these trends is available from the newsletters for the individual JOLs. Links to the JOL newsletters can be found at <http://www.inasp.info/file/4fd988568504d4bcfa2f4cd855a07d45/jols.html>.
- [5] AsiaJOL <http://www.asiajol.info/>.

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