

## Turning of the tides: Saudi Arabia sits a top in the academic impact factor race in the region

Research in science and social science sectors play an essential role in a country's communal and economic growth along with long-term viable developments.<sup>[1]</sup> Innovative research in science and technology contribute to improving living standards and an excellence of life. Scholarly journals have been in existence for over 350 years and have an impact in scientific advancement, scholarly credits, exchange of knowledge, validating the quality of research, and building of the scientific nations.<sup>[2,3]</sup>

Saudi Arabia is home to approximately 33 million people, 80 universities and degree awarding institutes, and 30 medical universities and schools.<sup>[1,4]</sup> In Saudi Arabia, there are 26 journals in various academic disciplines of science and social sciences. In the last week of June 2018, Philadelphia, USA-based Thomson Reuters, Institute of Scientific Information (ISI) Web of Science also known as "Clarivate Analytics," a highly reputable indexing institute in global science community, released its annual worldwide science and social science journals impact factor (IF) list of the year 2017.<sup>[5]</sup>

The IF is widely used in academia as a yardstick of a journal's prestige. From Saudi Arabia, out of 26 academic journals, 12 (46.15%) achieved a place in ISI-Web of Science.<sup>[5]</sup>

Worldwide, 34,171 journals are available in various academic disciplines; however, only 12,271 (35.91%) science and social sciences journals are indexed in the ISI-Web of Science and their IF varies from around 0.001 to 244.58. The *Cancer Journal for Clinicians* USA achieved the top position in the world with an IF of 244.58. The other leading journals are *New England Journal of Medicine* USA 79.25, *Lancet* USA 53.24, *Nature* UK 41.57, and *Science* USA 41.05. These journals are constantly publishing novel and innovative research which has maintained their topmost positions in the global IF race.<sup>[5]</sup>

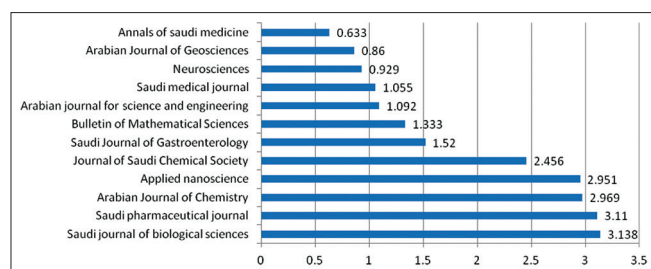
In the Middle East, Saudi Arabia now leads the region with 12 indexed academic journals achieving a remarkable position in ISI-Web of science with IFs ranging from 0.0633 to 3.138. Egypt has six indexed journals with IFs ranging from 0.163 to 4.327, Kuwait has four indexed journals with IFs ranging from 0.063 to 1.53, and Jordan has only one indexed journal in ISI-Web of Science with an IF of 0.660. Although the United

Arab Emirates (UAE) has 39 indexed academic journals with IFs ranging from 0.299 to 4.968, only 1 journal achieved a position in the first quartile ranking.<sup>[5]</sup> However, 38 out of the 39 indexed UAE journals belong to an international publishing institute "Bentham Science Publishing Limited" which have offices almost all over the world including the UAE. Only one of the UAE indexed journals *Emirates Journal of Food and Agriculture* which has an IF of 0.609 is hosted by a UAE university. The remaining Arab world countries including Qatar, Bahrain, Sultanate of Oman, Morocco, Algeria, Sudan, and Tunisia did not achieve a place in the ISI-Web of Science index.

Two Saudi medical sciences journals, *Saudi Journal of Biological Sciences* with an IF of 3.138 and *Saudi Pharmaceutical Journal* with an IF of 3.139, exceeded the IF of more than 3.<sup>[5]</sup> While comparing the quartile factor of the ranking of the journals, a subject category in percentile rank, two Saudi science journals, *Saudi Journal of Biological Sciences* hosted by King Saud University and *Riyadh and Bulletin of Mathematical Sciences* hosted by King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, achieved a place in the first quartile ranking of journals [Figure 1].<sup>[5]</sup>

This is the first time in the history of Saudi Arabia, where two Saudi science journals, *Saudi Journal of Biological Sciences* with an IF of 3.138 and *Saudi Pharmaceutical Journal* with an IF of 3.139, exceed the IF of 3<sup>[5]</sup> and also achieve a place in the first quartile ranking. Certainly, these journals are establishing a platform to publish quality innovative research and producing research results that are profitable at both the regional and international levels. One more good news about Saudi Arabia journals is the inclusion of the *Saudi Journal of Anesthesia* in the Emerging Sources Citation Index which is a preliminary step forward in getting full ISI inclusion in Thomson Reuter's Web of Science. Now, the journal is under scrutinized inspection for possible inclusion in the Web of Science race.<sup>[6]</sup>

Another surprising figure is, Saudi Arabia leaping over Israel in the IF race. Although Israel has 15 ISI-Web of Science-indexed journals with the lowest one being *Israel Journal of Veterinary Medicine* with an IF of 0.304 and the highest being *Israel Journal of Chemistry* with an IF of 2.60. However, not a single academic journal of Israel achieved a place in the first quartile ranking and exceeded an IF of over 3.<sup>[5]</sup>



**Figure 1: Impact factor of Saudi Journal Institute of Scientific Information-Web of Science 2018**

There are many science metrics, including IF, C-index, *h*-index, Matthew value, Eigen factor, and article influence, but each has its own strength and limitation.<sup>[2]</sup> IF has an impact in the scientific community while taking decisions about where to publish, to promote, whom to hire and fire, and to receive research grants. There is great criticism and debate about the dominance of IF to measure the science indicators, but still, the large part of the science community believes that IF is a powerful tool for the global evaluation of the scientific quality and visibility.<sup>[2]</sup> However, the science community believes on the reliable role of *h*-index (measures both the productivity and citation impact); although this scientific measuring tool is still passing in its adolescent stage, with the passage of time, it will be a more powerful metric in measuring scientific credentials and the science among the scientists.

Saudi Arabia understands the worth of scientific research and its impact on economy, development, and long-term sustainability. Saudi Arabia further needs to promote collaboration with the talent-rich international institutes and share novel research in leading science journals to enhance the scientific visibility of the institutes as well as the nation.

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