

La Tunisie Médicale: Past, Present, and Future

Dear Editor,

Upon reading two of the thought-provoking articles published in your esteemed journal, *La Tunisie Médicale*, I was impressed by the depth of the analyses presented and how the arguments made were quite compelling. They have inspired me to share my own viewpoints on the raised subjects and ask for some further clarifications from the respected authors, kind of hear their opinions. The articles being discussed are: [*Let's Save the Indexing of the Journal "La Tunisie Médicale"*] (1), and [*Who are the Best Scientists in Tunisia? Analysis of the 2023 edition of the "Research.com" platform.*] (2). Both texts handle very important and sensitive issues related to the academic field, more specifically concerning publishing and rankings, whether of journals or scientists. It is evident and indisputable that evaluating, contemplating, and reflecting on scholarly performance parameters are true substantial responsibilities of the heaviest weight for senior researchers and prime research bodies at any country. Therefore, the significance of these two aforementioned texts cannot be overestimated, in other direct words, they are of supreme significance, of course. In the first paper, the respected authors dive deep into the analysis of the journal's outcomes and framework, the journal's mechanics. I learnt a lot from the paper and it really added to my knowledge. However, there are a few concepts that I would like to point out in this regard. I think that the third recommendation which was about focusing on more citeable content of original research studies is not a very good one and can even turn out to be a counterproductive part. There are many journals topping the lists while being dedicated only for reviews and case reports, for example. The respected authors' stance in trying to progress with their reputable journal and enhance its contents is crystal-clear, however, and from a critical perspective, this "citeable works" mandate is a questionable policy and I won't go on discussing it further as it is beyond the scope of a letter to the editor. Also, the idea of having a "daughter" journal, if applied, will result in having the efforts, as well as citations, get more divided and lost. The new daughter journal will require a dedicated editorial board and a huge list of reviewers besides the technical burden, for sure, which if they are all provided to the "mother" journal will definitely shift its very good standing into a super excellent status. As a Tunisian journal, it is normally expected that most of the editorial board members and reviewers will be Tunisians, or from the Maghreb, yet, a good choice in the quest of editorial reform can be having multi-national board members in addition to the

majority of national ones, not only encompassing many specialties but also other nationalities, both are required, this will bring more international audience (and citations) without the need to follow them. Moreover, I think the best way to save the journal's indexing in any database is by applying for further abstracting and indexing services by other bodies, like Europe PMC, CINAHL, EBSCO, and Embase, as examples. The best way to secure the indexing in any database is by having the journal get indexed in another one, it is sort of a proactive measure rather than a reactive procedure. I would like to kindly ask the respected authors about the reasoning behind their recommendations. The editorial assessment and review they had previously showed them the problems, how did they settle on the solutions?

In the second paper, the respected authors look at the academic product from a different angle and try to evaluate the researchers' work based on the findings of an online platform. The work is detailed and organised in a notable manner, and portrays much effort carried out by the team. Nevertheless, I didn't find any strong justifications for depending on the platform used. I mean to say, international committees, world-wide agencies, and even each and every country, should have their own scientific criteria in light of their needs, agendas, objectives, etc. I believe that, although the mentioned scientists are highly valued, many other equal or superior academics from Tunisia are not listed in this analysis as it doesn't take into consideration the Tunisian case as an individual specific situation. In fact, what is important for the world can be useless to Tunisia and vice versa. On top of that, many numeral indices were shown later to be unable to depict the accurate picture when it comes to research and studies impact, this is only a hint of a larger and more profound scientific consideration. Had this study been carried out only for the sake of abstract academic evaluation then a better approach would have been that which is dependent on Scopus, for instance, just like the one carried out and published in your esteemed journal, three years earlier, too (3). I would like to kindly ask the respected authors about their reasons for choosing the selected website as a resource in their studies, current and previous, why "research.com" and what were the negatives about it, based on their experiences dealing with it, and how to avoid them?

If I am to further suggest very important advice to both the respected authors and the highly revered editorial board, then I won't but ascertain some of the findings reached in a quasi-experimental study of the journal's editorial performance (4). It states very clearly that publishing in English is a critical success factor, a logical finding and solution to reach more readers, globally. Finally, with a legacy dating back to 1903 and such high-quality

and worldwide-class publications, with such positively progressive journal metrics (5) as shown in Table 1, with this super active, hardworking, and brilliant editorial board, I think that the future of La Tunisie Médicale is going to be presented and symbolised in all respectful databases. I would like to cease this opportunity again to salute the team behind La Tunisie Médicale for their precious time and huge efforts spent until they have reached such an awesome standing-point for their esteemed journal. This journal should be marketed more and more as an international medical journal from Tunisia rather than a Tunisian medical journal with a limited focus on the Maghreb. It is time to move forward.

Table 1. La Tunisie Médicale's Metrics for the Last 5 Years as to Scopus Database.

Year	CiteScore	% Cited	SNIP	SJR
2022	1.0	40	0.254	0.214
2021	0.8	34	0.344	0.286
2020	0.4	26	0.26	0.199
2019	0.3	21	0.187	0.163
2018	0.4	23	0.143	0.152

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AUTHOR'S ANSWER

"La Tunisie Médicale" Towards greater editorial visibility and academic recognition

Dear Editor,

On behalf of the signatory teams of the national bibliometric studies and the editorial family of "La Tunisie Médicale" journal, I would like to thank the corresponding colleague [1] who reacted favorably to our two scientific papers on the strategic development plan for our national journal for the 2020-2029 period: "Let's save the indexing of "La Tunisie Médicale" [2], and "Who are the Best Scientists in Tunisia? Analysis of the 2023 edition of the Research.com platform" [3].

Indeed, from the onset of the current decade, "La Tunisie Médicale" began to sense the disastrous repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic which has destabilized national health and teaching and scientific research systems in low and middle-income countries, including the Great Maghreb. Being the only non-profit Maghrebian journal which remains indexed in MEDLINE currently, "La Tunisie Médicale" holds a scientific heritage of great value, which ought to be consolidated not only for Tunisia, but also for the whole of the African continent and the Middle East. Like our colleague, we believe in the need for the collective participation of all the editorial players (authors, reviewers, readers, publishers, civil society, decision-makers, etc.) in the project aiming at achieving preparation, resilience, and excellence among the journals of the scientific learned societies, including "La Tunisie Médicale", which was created 120 years ago. The prime objective of this project is to ensure the continuity of the journal and its editorial visibility, in line with international standards of thematic relevance, methodological rigor, scientific transparency, and open access.

Within a context of limited resources and voluntary work constraints, such editorial dynamics are faced today with multiple threats concerning the viability and sustainability of scientific journals in developing countries. Among these threats are massive university desertification, the scarcity of budgets allocated to scientific research (reimbursing, even minimally, APC "Articles Processing Charges"), the crisis in the reviewing process of the dominant "open access" editorial model (a time-consuming activity that is still little valued), and the professionalization of modern scientific communication logistics which involves the mobilization of multiple digital technologies and numerous specialized and full-time skills. Thus, strategic, cross-sector, and multidisciplinary thinking should be based on a solid foundation of bibliometric data (scientific conferences, academic dissertations, research articles), not only in Tunisia, but across the entire population covered by "La Tunisie Médicale" journal. Our colleague's correspondence [1] discussed two subjects that are essential for research excellence: the editorial visibility of scientific journals and the academic reputation of researchers, mainly practicing in countries with moderate resources, such as Tunisia.

Firstly, the editorial visibility of scientific journals is based on numerous indices measured by the major publishers, including, particularly, the "Impact Factor" of Clarivate's "Journal Citation Report" (JCR), and Elsevier's "CiteScore" and "Scientific Journal Ranking" (SJR) metrics (Scopus / Scimago). Regardless of the methodological specificities involved in calculating these indicators, editorial visibility refers to the ratio between the number of papers published (denominator) and the frequency and speed of their citations by new documents (numerator). Thus, the steering committees of scientific journals, even those of the world's mega-publishers, remain under constant pressure to ensure that their papers which are selected for publication (considered a priori to be more "citable") are highly attractive, and that they are eventually "cited"

by prolific researchers. It is currently acknowledged that the most "citable" scientific articles (with a high level of evidence and therefore a longer consultation period) are those from synthetic research, particularly systematic reviews and meta-analyses, in line with the Evidence-based Medicine paradigm (as opposed to "case reports", "expert opinions" and "narrative studies"). The indexing of periodicals in prestigious bibliographic databases in the health sciences, including MEDLINE, Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus, contributes significantly to the identification of documents to be consulted during the documentation phase, and their subsequent use during the drafting phase of scientific manuscripts (preferably written in the dominant academic language). Thus, a paper of good methodological and editorial quality would have a greater chance of being cited, as a consequence of these two determining factors of the ratio: citations/documents (type of publication of the "credible" manuscript and chance of its "citation" in the international scientific press). For this reason, the editorial team of "La Tunisie Médicale" journal [4,5] has gradually moved towards prioritizing synthetic studies of biomedical literature, writing them in English and promoting them in the broad spectrum of databases, bibliographic platforms, and social networks. Faced with the pressures of the academic archeo-system of clinical research and the traditional writing of practice dissertations in Tunisian faculties of health sciences (still accepting "case reports" and "narrative studies" in recruitment and promotion competitions), and in order to avoid editorial penalization by the mathematical procedures for calculating impact and citation indicators, "La Tunisie Médicale" plans to publish additional special issues for the annual compilation of "case reports" and articles of the "review" type. This is a transitional editorial measure preceding the introduction of excellence standards in scientific research, in university and professional evaluation grids. In addition, "La Tunisie Médicale" continues to reinforce its call for the champions of the scientific research "Diaspora" [6] and researchers from the Great Maghreb, Africa, and the Middle East, to submit extracts of the results of their innovative research to our national journal, as part of thematic dossiers, editorials and short communications. The new "Maghreb Health" section and special issues ("Ramadan and Health" [7], "Public Health in the Greater Maghreb" [8] and "40 years of Primary Health Care in Tunisia" [9]) have helped promote the editorial visibility of "La Tunisie Médicale".

Secondly, the academic reputation of researchers is measured objectively by international authorities which assess scientific performance. Following the launch, over two decades ago, of the Shanghai ranking of the world's best universities, based on an explicit, transparent, and independent methodology, new rankings have recently appeared, focusing on the "most cited" researchers in academic journals. "Top 1%" and "Top 2%" lists are drawn up annually by the major international publishers (Clarivate and Elsevier), based on their databases (WoS, Scopus) and indirectly promoting their specific

bouquets of scientific journals. While university rankings are based on a panel of indicators covering pedagogy (quality of education, quality of teaching staff), academic management, and the social responsibility of universities, rankings involving researchers are more focused on scientific production (number of papers published) and their visibility in the international press (citations). Certainly, the extended temporal and spatial coverage of scientific literature by reference databases (extension of the period of inclusion, diversity of journals, etc.) and the methods of categorization of the fields of scientific research and its multiple academic disciplines, notably influence the final outputs of these rankings, both internationally (by continents, by countries and by fields) and nationally (by universities, by institutions, and by disciplines). It was with the aim of exploring the national "Diaspora" of academic excellence and the most cited research "leaders" in the African region and the Middle East, that we analyzed the rankings of scientists, deduced from the databases of the various publishers of international rankings, without any intention of personalized evaluation, influencing their professional careers or academic status. Following the identification of today's scientific publication champions [6], "La Tunisie Médicale" continues to invite pioneering research teams to consider our national journal as one of the preferred journals to which their publications can be sent, in full, condensed, or informative format, to motivate their PhD students to publish their protocols [10] of their research subjects, and to pass on to them the lessons of excellence emanating from their academic careers: what opportunities to seize? What are the threats? According to the editorial team of "La Tunisie Médicale" magazine, the Research.com platform, which ranks the world's best scientists, is a valuable source of bibliometric data on national scientific production (publications) and its worldwide influence (citations). Initially launched in 2014, Research.com published its second edition in November 2023 to map global scientific production and use and identify international research champions by country, university and discipline. This ranking of researchers is based on their "D" (Discipline) index, which is simply the specification of the "H" (Hirsh) index, for a given discipline, thus translating the number of influential papers, written by scientists in a particular field (number "D" of articles, receiving at least "D" citations in a specific discipline). The 2023 edition of the Research.com ranking covered some 166880 scientists, with the top spot being held by Professor Walter C. Willett [11] of Harvard University ("H"=385). The average "H" index for the top 1% of scientists was 311 (compared with an average of 181 for the top 1000 scientists included in the Research.com ranking). The average number of citations for the top 1% of scientists was 433775 (versus an average of 160906 for the top 1000 researchers, according to this platform). The authors of these two papers [2,3] declare the absence of any conflicts of interest with the Research.com platform, and acknowledge, with admiration, the significant efforts of its co-founder, Professor Imed Bouchrika, PhD in Computer Science from the University of Southampton (UK, 2008) and currently Professor of Computer Science at

the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Intelligence Artificielle in Algeria. Following the development of several startups in the Artificial Intelligence and academic sectors, and as a continuation of the Guide2Research project, the Research.com platform was born to unearth the "Best Scientists", the "Best University", the "Best Journals", and the "Best Conferences".

Once again, we greatly appreciate the corresponding author's suggestions for promoting the editorial visibility of "La Tunisie Médicale" and the academic reputation of its large family of authors, reviewers, and readers, in Tunisia, Africa, and the Middle East. Firstly, English is now the preferred language for writing scientific research articles, without excluding the use of French for didactic articles (paradoxically, the Maghreb continues to administer health science teaching in French), and Arabic for themes of community and managerial interest (the four Tunisian faculties of Medicine are now accredited and therefore socially responsible!). Secondly, the creation of "offspring" journals would require, as the corresponding author puts it, major technical efforts which are difficult to bear by the "mother" journal in a country with limited resources, confronted with a kind of "editorial imperialism" that is masked by deceptive marketing (a seductive communication campaign focused on open access and concealing its APC which sometimes exceeds ten times the monthly salary of a research scientist working in a middle-income country).

Finally, in line with our editorial policy of internationalizing the scientific content of "La Tunisie Médicale", we encourage all researchers in Tunisia, the Greater Maghreb, Africa, and the Middle East to support our national journal by submitting their original research work, accepting the invitation to review manuscripts, and joining its committee of associate editors, increasingly representing the broad spectrum of healthcare practices (medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, nursing, . . .), scientific fields (basic sciences, medical, surgical, public health), academic disciplines (clinical, biological, radiological specialties, . . .), cross-sectional strategies (research ethics, scientific integrity, artificial intelligence, . . .) and geographical areas covered (Maghreb, Africa, Middle East, . . .). The vision of "La Tunisie Médicale" remains consistent with the mission of its founders: **a medical journal "from Tunisia" open to the international scene, and not an international medical journal "published in Tunisia" [12].**

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