

Initial Inquiry Report on Quality of the Contents Published by the Journal ‘Advancements in Life Sciences’ in 2024/25

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1 Preamble

This inquiry report is a result of an internal examination of the content published by the journal in the years 2024 and 2025. This examination was warranted in the extra-ordinary editorial board meeting held on 02 April 2025 consequent to the change in status of the journal in Web of Science (WoS) index to 'on-hold' on account of quality concerns raised by the editorial team of WoS.

2 Process of inquiry

Considering the instructions of the board meeting, a five (5) members inquiry team was constituted with the following roles.

Sr No.	Name	Role
1.	Prof Dr (R) Tayyab Husnain	Scientific evaluation
2.	Prof Dr (R) Syed Shahid Ali	Scientific evaluation
3.	Prof Dr (R) Tariq Mahmud	Scientific evaluation
4.	Prof Dr (R) Idrees Ahmad Nasir	Scientific evaluation / process examination
5.	Dr Shafique Ahmed	Process / record examination

Table 1: Names and roles of the inquiry team.

2.1 Terms of reference for scientific evaluation

Scientific evaluation of the published content in paper printed form was conducted on the following terms.

1. Technical Review

1.1. Inquiry team may please assess the accuracy, relevance, and rigor of the research using following questions.

- Does this study fall under the scope of this journal?
- Is data or verbatim plagiarised with already available literature?
- Are the analyses done or figures presented are of acceptable quality standards? Are they well-labelled, relevant, and correctly referenced?
- Is the study design, i.e., sampling method, RCBD design, positive / negative controls etc., are valid?
- Are measurement units correctly used and consistent throughout the paper?
- Does the paper adhere to COPE and research ethics guidelines?

2. Writing & Editorial Review

1.2. Inquiry team may please review clarity, coherence, and adherence to publishing standards using following questions.

- Is the writing formal, precise, and appropriate for an academic audience?
- Are there any grammatical errors, incorrect punctuation, or awkward phrasing?
- Are in-text citations and bibliography entries formatted uniformly according to the journal's style guide?

- d) Are there redundant sections or ideas repeated unnecessarily?
- e) Does it comply with the journal's style guide?

3. Access to data

- a) This inquiry team shall be given access to the required data and documents by the editorial team.
- b) However, to protect confidentiality of the double-blind peer review process, the inquiry team or members of team are bound not to share or disclose information outside the scope of this inquiry.

4. Duration of the inquiry

- a) Inquiry team shall complete this examination within three (3) working weeks starting from 07 April 2025.
- b) Any delay or requisition of extension in timeline by any team member may please put up by the concerned member before expiration of the deadline.

For Public Release

3 Summary of Findings

1. A total of 172 articles published by the journal in 2024 and 2025 were evaluated by the record and scientific evaluation team members. These articles were from volume 11 and volume 12.
2. Editorial selection of articles has shown clear shift from biological to biomedical sciences which yet falls under the scope of the journal but evidence of changes in the published content.
3. As per presented record before the team, similarity index or commonly known as *Verbatim* plagiarism was found consistent with the global standards and standards outlined by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, i.e., less than 20% similarity index (generated using Turnitin) with no more than 4% from a single source.
4. The team was told that journal has policy of 'no AI generated and / or AI paraphrased text'. However, this policy is not available in 'Instruction to Authors' section/page.
5. High-details figures presented in many manuscripts are not very readable in the printed format. From the total completely examined articles, in one article, graphs did not have proper analyses elements i.e., standard error bar and / or standard deviation bar (ID 2104).
6. Legends of figures were found to be satisfactory from explanation perspective. Sourcing of images were also found mentioned at almost all occasions.
7. From the total completely examined articles, at least on one occasion, PCR results did not have labelled positive and negative controls (ID 1850).
8. Use of measurement units consistent with scientific writing style has been found to be major quality issue at numerous occasions.
9. Consistent use of μ sign, and L^{-1} etc along with use of space between reading and unit needs special attention by copyeditors and layout preparation team. The same may be applied to roman terms e.g., et al.
10. It is commendable to see that almost in every case where human and / or animal subjects were involved, editorial team had required Research Ethics Approval certificate from authors issued by the concerned authorities.
11. Description of animal housing conditions, sample drawing methods and process of taking informed consent was found in all related studies without exception.
12. Very consistent types of errors have been found in use of English language and grammar. Use of full stops, comas, pronouns, adjectives and verbs with consistent form has been found to be prevalent problem in many published studies.
13. In-text references and their formatting style in the bibliographic section was fairly consistent across all the evaluated manuscripts. However, missing information related to volume and issue number of the cited references was noted.
14. There are occasions where authors didn't map their results as per stated methods.
15. Importantly, there are at least 02 studies which do not qualify to be "full length research article" but only as "short communication" as per precedent set by the journal itself.
16. Detailed screening of editorial record discovered that in metadata of certain manuscripts, one email address was used for multiple authors. Often the case, it was email address of submitter of the manuscripts.
17. This may impact flow of information and onboarding to all authors at all stages of editorial workflow.

18. The inquiry team is pleased to see the success and acceptance of content published by the journal vis-à-vis number of citations [its articles] received from wider community in different SCIE and ESCI journals.
19. All members of the committee are also satisfied with the system in place for keeping of the record and ancillary information in an auditable format.
20. The inquiry team has seen no record of involvement of the publisher in scholarly evaluation and content selection process of the journal. This is also evident from the stable trend in number of published papers (table 3).
21. A noteworthy practice of meaningful acknowledgement of peer reviewers through awarding review certificate and a coupon of 50 USD (claimable for any of their future submissions to the journal) was marked.
22. Although not strictly a misconduct, but reviewers from same institute of the corresponding author was found in two (2) separate cases.
23. In line with the Web of Science "Exceptions to standard embargo and removal from coverage policies" need for editorial expression of concern has been identified for 24 published article on account of different errors.

Sr No.	Type of Errors Found After Publishing / Other Discrepancy	Occasions
1.	Minor (language and references)	3
2.	References Error	4
3.	Major (data/analyses)	1
4.	Minor (language)	5
5.	Record or parts of record not available	6
6.	Minor (language and quality of figures)	1
7.	Major (plagiarism and / or AI generated content)	4

Table 2: Breakup of post-publication errors in the examined papers.

24. Inquiry team has found 17 occasions of issuance of post-publication editorial notes describing changes in the articles published in 2024 / 25, e.g., <https://www.als-journal.com/1214-25/>.

4 Manuscript Level Details of the Inquiry

Following fifteen (15) quality / data indicators of each of the published manuscript, consistent with purview of this inquiry, were examined. These indicators pertain to integrity of record, their public standing, integrity/standards of quality and recommendations for corrective measures.

1. Manuscript ID
2. Manuscript Title
3. Manuscript Type
4. Scope Compliance
5. Turnitin Similarity Index (in percentage)
6. AI Generated / Paraphrased Content
7. No. of Peer Reviewers / Reports
8. Processing Time (Months)
9. Country of the Corresponding Author
10. Published (in)

11. APCs Charged
12. Citations Received till Date
13. Type of Errors Found After Publishing
14. Misconduct Found if any
15. Corrective Measures to be Taken

Manuscript-level analyses sheet is available at the following link.

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/19fqZSDL8UvD3YupDi2sn72ma9RRoDsAo/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=107562856663851979008&rtpof=true&sd=true>

5 Additional Considerations by the Inquiry Team

Since this inquiry is a result of concerns raised by the Web of Science, the team also examined following indicators at journal / article level in addition to the fifteen (15) indicators mentioned in section D. These indicators were sourced from subsection 'Editorial evaluation (quality)' of "Journal evaluation process and selection criteria" outlined by Web of Science under Web of Science Core Collection (Editorial selection process).

- *Editorial Board composition*
Editorial board of the journal is diverse and has representation from both technically developed and developing nations. This board of forty-five (45) members is distributed in senior editors and section editors / advisors supported by one (1) statistician and four (4) editorial team members. We suggest revisiting profiles of the editors and if required implement changes in the board to better support the recent change in publication pattern from biological to biomedical sciences.
- *Validity of statements*
We did not find any notable deviation in the published material from stated policies on article types, peer review, plagiarism, authorship or conflict of interest statements.
- *Grant support details*
Satisfactory information under the 'acknowledgement' section was found in many examined manuscripts.
- *Adherence to community standards*
Editorial policies were found consistent with recognized best practices, such as COPE Core Practices. Interestingly, it is claimed that Policy Guidelines of the Advancements in Life Sciences were reviewed by Dr. Elizabeth Wager (Ex Chair of the COPE). This claim is substantiated by verified participation of the then managing editor in the workshop "Publishing Life Science Research" moderated by Dr. Elizabeth Wager conducted by American Society for Microbiology during 1-3 May 2017.

6 Recommendations by the Inquiry Team

Inquiry team is pleased to experience the openness and transparency of the journal processes. However, to meet the international publishing standards of scientific literature, the editorial board is recommended to apply following changes immediately.

1. Add editorial policy on use of AI generated / paraphrased text.
2. Strengthen Human Resource by onboarding experienced copyeditors who could iron out minor language, scientific writing of units/names, and layout errors.

3. Strengthen peer review process and strictly implement policy of 'no reviewers from the same institute / department'.
4. Push authors for provisioning of high-quality images/figures.
5. Pay special attention to indicators of statistical analyses (in tables, figure and text).
6. Senior editors must take charge when defining category of any manuscript (e.g., full length research article, short communication etc.).
7. Since all members of the editorial team (except web masters) are doctoral students, senior board members must mentor them on best practices of scholarly publishing, screening of figures and validating metadata of submitted manuscripts.
8. Since the journal is an international outlet, increase in diversification of geographical origin of authors is encouraged.

7 Supplementary Notes / Suggestions

1. *Volume of published articles per issue*

As per internal and public record available, also shown below, there has not been unusual rise in number of articles published when compared with previous issues, except for volume 11, issue 3 where number was notably lower than the trend. The board is advised to calibrate content to be publicized as per available editorial staff who could satisfactorily vet all editorial stages during processing.

Volume (issue)	Number of Articles Published
Volume 11, issue 1 (2024)	39
Volume 11, issue 2 (2024)	40
Volume 11, issue 3 (2024)	25
Volume 11, issue 4 (2024)	31
Volume 12, issue 1 (2025)	37

Table 3: Number of articles published by the journal in each issue in 2024 / 25.

2. *Recalculation of processing timeline*

Seeing the data of processing time of each manuscript and their average is not consistent with the same given on the journal website, i.e.,

*Submission to initial decision: 14 days

*Submission to final decision: 40 days

*Acceptance to publication: 21 days

This calculation may be based on previous data or data calculated over a longer span of time (years). The board is advised to revisit and apply corrections if required.

8 Way Forward

1. The board is requested to present compliance report on all the eight (8) recommendations in two (2) weeks after issuance of this report.
2. Next phase of inquiry of the content published in 2022 and 2023 may be initiated after satisfactory compliance with the recommendations of current inquiry (upon completion).

9 About the Inquiry Team

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