



International Committee on Systematics of Prokaryotes

Online meeting of the ICSP Publications Committee with members of the MS IJSEM Publications Office

9th February 2024, 10.30-12.00 CET

Chair:

E.R.B. MOORE
University of Gothenburg
Sweden

Vice-Chair:

C.M. MANAIA
Universidade Católica Portuguesa
Portugal

Executive Secretary:

A. OREN
Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Israel

Secretary for Subcommittees:

S.L.W. ON
Lincoln University
New Zealand

Treasurer:

P. NIELSEN
Novozymes, Copenhagen
Denmark

Members at Large:

R. HAHNKE
Leibniz Institute DSMZ
Germany

M. SAKAMOTO
RIKEN BioResource
Research Center
Japan

Members of the Judicial Committee

Chair:

D.R. ARAHAL
University of Valencia
Spain

Vice-Chair:

H. CHRISTENSEN
University of Copenhagen
Denmark

Secretary:

M. GÖKER
Leibniz Institute DSMZ
Germany

Participated: C. Manaia (chair), A. Oren (secretary), D.R. Arahal, H. Christensen, E.R.B. Moore, M.E. Trujillo, and Microbiology Society staff members H. Cook, N. Froude, and J. Kelly. An apology was received from S.L.W. On.

Towards the improvement of paper quality, impact and impact factor of the IJSEM

The Publications Committee of the International Committee for Systematics of Prokaryotes (ICSP) discussed the impact and the impact factor of the IJSEM. In preparation for the meeting, M.E. Trujillo and all the participants received a list of comments and suggestions made by ICSP members during the 14th December plenary meeting or sent by email directly to E.R.B. Moore. These comments served as a backdrop to the discussion.

E.R.B. Moore pointed out that in the 1990s, the impact factor was above 3.0, which was good for placing the journal in the quartile 1 among microbiology journals, while today, the 2-yr impact factor (from Clarivate Analytics) is ~2.8, see: (<https://www.microbiologyresearch.org/article-journal-metrics>).

Thus, the impact factor has not decreased greatly. However, it is now in the quartile 3 of the journals in the field of microbiology. This information suggests that the problem of the impact factor for IJSEM may be more of an issue of many new journals (e.g., Frontiers) that compete for the publishing market.

D.R. Arahal noted that Scopus lists IJSEM in the first quartile in the category Ecology, Evolution, Behavior and Systematics, see: (<https://www.scopus.com/sourceid/19761>).

E.R.B. Moore also notes that SJR places IJSEM in the quartile 1 for Ecology, Evolution, Behavior and Systematics and in quartile 2 for the category of Microbiology, see: (<https://www.scimagojr.com/journalsearch.php?q=19761&tip=sid&clean=0>).

C. Manaia stressed that the impact factor is not the most relevant parameter: the quality of the papers is much more important. Unfortunately, many papers published in the IJSEM are no more than minimal descriptions of new taxa that have few special properties, and such papers are seldom cited.

E.R.B. Moore suggested that many of the new journals in the field of microbiology have focused on genomics analyses, which has carried a higher interest for readers. Even given that genome sequence determinations and analyses is required for describing new taxa in IJSEM, continuing problems in IJSEM articles has been that authors generally do not include in-depth genomic analyses. Rather, a strategy of 'double-dipping' has developed in which authors include minimal descriptions for IJSEM articles and then send the more detailed (and perhaps interesting) analyses to other journals.

International Committee on Systematics of Prokaryotes

M.E. Trujillo noted that not all the journal's editors are aware of the quality standards. She stated that better quality requires rejection of more papers. Many papers published in recent years could and should have been rejected because of their low quality. The descriptions of new taxa given in such papers may comply with the rules of the ICNP (International Code of Nomenclature of Prokaryotes), but that is not a sufficient reason for an editor to accept a manuscript for publication (it was pointed out that the ICNP considers only the issues of prokaryotic nomenclature; the Code does not consider other aspects of systematics and taxonomy, such as quality of analyses). The guidelines for accepting a paper in IJSEM are set by the Editorial Board and the ICSP and do include issues of quality and depth of analyses. A clear editorial policy needs to be understood that editors implement against acceptance of 'minimal description' papers.

E.R.B. Moore suggested that papers describing new taxa may be the only venue for presenting a comprehensive description of new taxa, including phenotypic and chemotaxonomic features. The IJSEM instructions for authors indicate that such characterisations are 'recommended', if necessary. Here, the reviewers and editors need to justify the necessity for such analyses.

M. Trujillo argued that she does not have a problem with genome sequence-based analyses of new taxa, if the analyses are comprehensive and done correctly.

E.R.B. Moore noted that the publication by Chun et al., 2018. Proposed minimal standards for the use of genome data for the taxonomy of prokaryotes. 68:461-466, is one of the most cited IJSEM publications. However, it is actually rare if authors adhere to those guidelines.

M.E. Trujillo informed that an updated version of the J. Chun paper on proposed minimal standards for the use of genome data for the taxonomy of prokaryotes is close to being published; this may provide more guidelines for authors and reviewers to follow; this paper is likely to also be highly cited. Such types of papers in IJSEM would be a good way to increase the impact factor.

The Publications Committee agreed that Editors must demand better quality control for the papers they are handling. According to the policy of the Microbiology Society, at least two reviewers should review each manuscript submitted to its journals. Some flexibility needs to be allowed, and an editor may act as a second reviewer as a last resort if two external referees willing to review a paper cannot be found. If this is necessary, there are two potential routes: 1) either a second editor can be invited formally as a second, anonymous reviewer or 2) the handling editor can provide detailed comments from themselves in the decision letter.

H. Christensen mentioned that marked discrepancies between reviews are problematic. One recommendation for rejection is justification for not accepting a paper for publication.

C. Manaia pointed out that some journals provide evaluation reports (e.g., once per year); this was thought to provide editors information for assessing their effectiveness. This will be considered for IJSEM to implement.

N. Froude will discuss this further with colleagues at the Microbiology Society, but noted that the Microbiology Society understood the need for increased quality of published papers.

M.E. Trujillo proposed to hold a meeting with the editors to clarify these issues.

International Committee on Systematics of Prokaryotes

C. Manaia will organize such a meeting and decide which members of the ICSP Publications Committee to invite. Having less papers published in the journal will have financial implications.

N. Froude will further investigate this aspect. M. Trujillo stated that decisions about different directions of the journal may need to be reached.

Informing the IJSEM editorial board about some important guidelines, including regarding the SeqCode

On 8th February, M. Göker circulated a draft letter to be sent to the IJSEM editors following discussion and approval by the Publications Committee. Because of lack of time and because the members of the Publications Committee had insufficient time to study the document, the details of the draft letter was not discussed. The discussion will be held after a meeting of the ICSP Publications Committee and the IJSEM editorial board. As the matter is not highly relevant to participating staff members of the Microbiology Society, they do not need to participate in the discussions.

Discussion about accepting minutes of meetings of ICSP committees and subcommittees for publication in the IJSEM without peer review.

The Publications Committee discussed a suggestion by M. Göker that peer review may not be necessary for publishing the minutes of meetings of ICSP committees, subcommittees on taxonomy, and other subcommittees. These minutes reflect the discussions held during the meetings, and only the meeting participants who had already approved the document before submission for publication in the IJSEM are capable of reviewing these documents.

A. Oren suggested that review by the Secretary for Subcommittees, S.L. W. On, may still be important.

M.E. Trujillo commented that such minutes often contain mistakes, incorrect names, and inactive links to websites.

It was therefore agreed that review is still needed, although it was suggested that the review would not be a 'peer review' but more of a 'technical editing'.

M.E. Trujillo indicated that she and S.L.W. On should be able to deal with this, as the number of such submissions is small.

C. Manaia will notify S.L.W. On of the decision.

Validation of names effectively published by authors affiliated with Russian institutions

A. Oren requested an update from the representatives of the Microbiology Society about the current status of the publishing embargo against Russian authors, which affects the possibility of validation of names effectively published by such authors outside the IJSEM.

International Committee on Systematics of Prokaryotes

J. Kelly responded that the Council of the Society has recently published an updated statement on this topic – See:

<https://microbiologysociety.org/news/society-news/update-to-a-statement-from-council.html/>

Manuscripts submitted to the Society's journals which declare Russian State funding within their acknowledgements or funding information statement will continue to be prohibited from being processed by Society staff or its vendors. This extends to articles submitted as requests to be included in validation lists.

However, authors based at Russian institutions which publicly expressed support for the war in Ukraine (<https://rsr-online.ru/news/2022/3/4/obrashenie-rossijskogo-soyuza-rektorov/>) will be offered the chance to publish without an affiliation. In cases wherein an author affiliated with one of these institutions has requested validation, the List Editors will be able to proceed with processing the request as long as the original research was not funded by the Russian state. Editorial Office staff members who are currently handling Validation requests will continue to flag any Russian-authored Validation requests to Microbiology Society staff prior to processing these requests. In case of doubt, the List Editors may consult J. Kelly.

The next meeting of the Publications Committee will be scheduled for mid-March.

Summary prepared by A. Oren
11th February 2024