

# Diamonds are not just a scientist's best friend

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Statement of interest

Statement of technology use

Supporting information

See p. 3

To say the least, the revenue model of publishers can be seen as a gold mine. Scientists write articles about their research that are reviewed by other colleagues, and final publication decisions are made by editorial boards that also consist of scientists and experts from the field. The role of the publisher is often limited to financing, and realizing platforms to support this entire running process in which almost everyone participates voluntarily without financial compensation. In an exaggerated and cynical manner, one could say that the publisher claps the hands and says thank you for all the work, and then fills the cash register with money. All's well that ends well.

It is not surprising that there is dissatisfaction among scientists about this revenue model of publishers. The regulations that they impose on publishing articles are often quite strict and ensure that financial interests are closely monitored. Anyone who wants to read an article about a study that, in most cases, was conducted with public funds, can only access it through an (institutional) subscription on the journal or through a one-off payment. Articles are like diamonds to publishers, and we all know that diamonds are forever, so count your winnings. After all, as a publisher you are sitting on a well-filled treasury, and you must guard the lock carefully.

Based on the premise that the current open access options that publishers offer, such as gold, bronze, and hybrid, are only accessible to authors who can rely on the so-called 'read-and-publish' agreements, the editorial staff of DuJAL advocates diamond open access (DOA), which guarantees authors to publish open access without any costs (Andringa et al., 2024). In this model, the running costs for publishers should be covered by national research institutions such as universities with the support of academic societies. DOA is a clear and sympathetic proposal and although understandable, it is a pity that the editors of DuJAL limit this proposal to the field of applied linguistics. After all,

the broad discussion regarding open access publishing applies to all scientific disciplines. Of course, the world cannot be improved all at once and we must start somewhere, but an important comment on the DOA proposal is that it cannot be widely implemented.

The editors' proposal to work on ethical and fair forms of open access publishing by setting up new, non-commercial open access journals, or flipping existing journals is wonderful, but practical objections stand in the way of realizing such an ideal. When looking at the large number of journals that are currently on the market, the financing of the running costs from academic institutions and academies can, at best, only be limited to a few journals. This applies not only to the field of applied linguistics but also to other scientific areas where the range of journals is often even greater. In specific situations, as illustrated in the case of DuJAL, it will certainly be possible to cover the running costs and realize DOA publications for authors, but this will be the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, science benefits from a great diversity of rated journals that offer researchers the opportunity to publish from diverse thematic scopes with different target groups. The rich and wide range of existing journals today should be cherished above all as an important and valuable source of information exchange.

It is also questionable whether the current options for open access indeed maintain and reinforce inequality between researchers in publishing their manuscripts, as stated by the editors of DuJAL (Andringa et al., 2024). With most journals, any researcher can submit a manuscript and upon acceptance, publication will follow, either closed or open. The ability to publish is independent of an author's country of origin or the availability of financial resources for open access. In principle, it is not the researcher as an author who has a problem with open access publishing, but the researcher as a reader who needs access to publishers' digital libraries. The fundamental core of this ethical issue is not so much the inequality between researchers, but about making research, often conducted with public funding, accessible to anyone who wants to know more about it. This not only concerns researchers, but also others, such as students, teachers, or policy makers. Currently, universities in the Netherlands pay a substantial amount in most cases to offer their employees and students free access to the digital libraries of many publishers. However, this is less well arranged for employees and students at universities of applied sciences or vocational academies. Many important and relevant digital libraries are not accessible to them. Besides, access to digital libraries disappears completely once students graduate, which is reprehensible from the perspective of lifelong learning and development. Diamonds are not exclusively a scientist's best friend, but in principle they should be available to everyone and not just to participants in scientific communities.

If anything is clear, it is that finances are the biggest obstacle to making publications freely accessible. The contribution of the editors of DuJAL is therefore a valuable impetus to re-examine and question the current business model of journals. We are faced with the absurd situation that scientific institutions must pay significant subscription fees for journals that can only exist thanks to the efforts of their own scholars, who often do this in working hours from the perspective that this is simply part of their scientific mission. I

therefore fully support DuJAL editors' statement that scholars must realize that decisions regarding publishing, reviewing, or editing are also ethical decisions. And as far as I am concerned, there is also no discussion about the fundamental principle that publications on research conducted with general resources should be freely accessible to everyone.

The proposal to realize DOA by founding non-commercial open access journals or flipping existing journals is fine, but this only covers a small part of the journal market. To gain more control over the business policy of publishers it is the moral obligation of all scholars not to carelessly volunteer their time to journals. Especially scholars in the position of editor or reviewer are indispensable to keeping journals running and have great power and responsibility towards the scientific community when it comes to discussing and enforcing full free open access of publishers' digital libraries.

There is nothing wrong with publishers aiming for a certain profit margin. After all, they are commercial enterprises and science benefits from a wide and diverse range of journals that publishers put on the market. However, reasonableness is often hard to find when the underlying revenue model they use is examined more closely. A skewed balance has emerged in which the financial interests of publishers outweigh the substantive interests of science. It is to the credit of the DuJAL editorial staff that they are bringing the subject back into the spotlight focused on searching for opportunities to realize full open access of publications for everybody.

### Author contributions

Ron Oostdam: Conceptualization; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing.

### Statement of interest

The author(s) have declared that there were no conflicting interests.

### Statement of technology use

No AI-based generative technology was used in the preparation of this manuscript and the execution of the research that the manuscript reports upon.

### Supporting information

None.

### References

Andringa, S., Mos, M., Van Beuningen, C., González, P., Hornikx, J. and Steinkrauss, R. (2024). Diamond is a scientist's best friend: Counteracting systemic inequality in open access publishing, *Dutch Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 13, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.51751/dujal18802>