When Diamond is still a luxury: An early career researcher perspective

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Andringa et al. (henceforth the authors; 2024) drew attention to the absurdity of for-profit open access (OA) publishing models and made a compelling case why such models perpetuate systemic inequality. As an early career researcher (ECR), I wholeheartedly support this call for change and the vision for a more equitable and inclusive future.

However, while Diamond OA is free, it remains a luxury for many ECRs. The authors acknowledged that senior researchers are better positioned to drive change as "their decisions are less likely to reflect negatively on their careers" (p. 10). I appreciate this recognition of the precarious conditions that most ECRs are working in and agree that senior researchers have a moral obligation to lead the transition towards Diamond OA. Nevertheless, I argue that ECRs can also make a difference through grassroots communities, even as we navigate the pressures of the current research evaluation system that makes Diamond OA a luxury.

1 The unaffordable free Diamond

Like me, many ECRs are working on timed contracts with publishing in high impact journals being a condition for contract renewal. The pressure to keep our jobs makes the free Diamond OA a prohibitive luxury, even when we fully recognize its importance. This is a classic case of the "disconnect between what is good for scientists and what is good for science" (Nosek et al., 2012, p. 616), a misalignment that extends to many open

scholarship practices. Such a dilemma is pungently described by De Herde et al. (2021, p. 2):

> Many of us are strong supporters of open science, but there is always a gap between consciousness and action. Whether we like it or not, with a few exceptions, we all know that metrics will not disappear overnight, but will still be on the table at the time we will be (and are) evaluated. The game may be rigged, but we all are forced to play.

As I have discussed elsewhere with colleagues (Liu & De Cat, in press; Liu & Marsden, 2024), this misalignment is a root cause of structural barriers to the adoption of open scholarship practices in our field, despite positive attitudes. Faced with such systemic barriers, how should ECRs respond?

2 The bystander approach and the martyr approach

One response is the bystander approach, where ECRs take shield behind the authors' call and continue to research and publish "business-as-usual" while waiting for senior researchers to lead the change towards Diamond OA and other open scholarship practices. If this sounds too passive to be admissible, then there is a variation that seems more "proactive" – "play by the rules until you became 'established enough' and then leverage that to help change the system from within" (De Herde et al., 2021, p. 3). I'll admit, this version seems tempting but deep down inside I also know that the biggest risk of this is that the day of "enough" may never come, and we'll just end up perpetuating the status quo.

Going to the other end of the spectrum, we have the martyr approach. This is where ECRs fully embrace Diamond OA and other open scholarship practices, regardless of the cost. While such commitment is admirable and noble, to me this is underpinned by an "all-or-nothing" mentality that is ultimately unsustainable and risks forcing those most passionate about the cause out of academia. To quote Susi (2022): "open science needs no martyrs, but we must recognize the need for reform" (p. 107). Indeed, what we need is not a few martyrs who sacrifice everything for the cause but collective efforts where everyone contributes to systemic change.

3 Empowering ECRs through grassroots communities

Then, how can ECRs contribute to this shift towards Diamond OA? Even when publishing exclusively in Diamond OA is not viable, ECRs can still contribute by serving as peer reviewers, supporting professional bodies that finance Diamond OA, and endorsing

Diamond OA initiatives. In addition to these meaningful contributions, I argue that ECRs can make an even greater difference through grassroots communities. ECRs may not have the same power as senior researchers, but they have strength in numbers and can lead change through a community approach. Open Applied Linguistics, a research network affiliated with AILA (International Association of Applied Linguistics), is one such community dedicated to the promotion of open scholarship in the field. As mentioned by the authors (p. 7), a significant barrier to Diamond OA is the negative attitude towards OA caused by predatory journals. To address this, we can leverage platforms such as Open Applied Linguistics to raise awareness, dispel misconceptions, and generate momentum for Diamond OA through webinars, reading club series, and social media campaigns. I encourage more ECRs to join these efforts. Our past events and resources (available at https://openappliedlinguistics.org) demonstrate the potential of such communities in empowering ECRs and advancing open scholarship.

To conclude, while Diamond OA is still a luxury for many ECRs, we cannot afford to be bystanders in the face of systemic inequality. As the future generation of our field, we have a moral obligation, too, to contribute to the shift towards Diamond OA. Drawing on our collective strength through grassroots communities, ECRs can and should join forces with senior researchers in driving change towards more equitable scholarship.

Author contributions

Meng Liu: Conceptualization; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing.

Statement of interest

I am the co-founder and co-convenor of Open Applied Linguistics (https://openappliedlinguistics.org/), an AILA (International Association of Applied Linguistics) research network dedicated to the promotion of open scholarship in applied linguistics. Promoting Diamond OA in general and through grassroots communities in particular aligns with the mission of Open Applied Linguistics.

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.

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