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Multilingual Scholarly Journal Publishing in Iran

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ABSTRACT

Despite the dominance of English-language journals in international databases, the global scholarly publishing ecosystem is far more multilingual. This study presents the first comprehensive analysis of Iran's journal publishing landscape, uncovering a complex ecosystem of 3250 active and 639 discontinued journals published in English, Persian and Arabic. Drawing on multiple national databases and journal websites, we examine language, subject area, ownership, publishing platforms, open access models and indexation status. Our findings reveal distinct patterns: Persian-language journals dominate in social sciences and humanities, while English-language journals are concentrated in medical and STEM fields. All journals are locally owned and use domestically developed journal platforms with right-to-left language support. The vast majority (99.2%) are open access. Sanctions have limited access to international infrastructure, prompting local innovations such as the Digital Object Recognizer (DOR), a national alternative to DOI. In contrast to mainstream practice, most Iranian journals pay peer reviewers and use a two-part article processing charge (APC): a non-refundable fee at submission to cover peer review and a second payment upon acceptance. This study shows the scale and specificity of scholarly publishing in a non-Western context and challenges the database-centric view of global publishing by foregrounding local responses to structural constraints.

1 | Introduction

One can assume with so many countries and languages each with its own research and higher education system, the journal publishing ecosystem, especially if we include local and national journals, must be very diverse. However, our current understanding of journal publishing globally is limited to a great extent to the mainstream international journal publishing that mostly concerns English journals. One reason for this might be that most studies rely on major databases such as *Scopus* and *Web of Science* which cover a limited number of journals and are biased towards English journals. Research by Khanna et al. (2022) that investigated more than 25,000 journals using *Open Journal Systems* (OJS) revealed that the global journal publishing ecosystem is substantially more diverse than what is represented in major databases. This diversity is even more extensive than previously understood, as the study's scope was

limited by technological constraints. For instance, OJS is not extensively used by journals published in non-Roman languages which leads to significant underrepresentation. Specifically, the researchers found only 88 Arabic journals using OJS, a number that is undoubtedly far lower than the actual volume of Arabic-language scholarly publishing.

Local or national journals are important as they play specific roles that are not covered by international journals. Local journals, especially those published in non-English languages, have educational (Loadsman 2019; Mills et al. 2009), professional and societal roles deeply connected to the local educational system and cultural context. They facilitate interaction between practitioners and academics, support the translation of theory into practice (Hughes 2015), and are particularly significant in fields like medicine, where practices can vary significantly between countries (Groeneveld 2010).

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Key Points

- Iranian journals include 3250 active journals across three languages: Persian, English and Arabic.
- Most journals are owned by public universities and published using locally developed journal platforms and are open access (OA).
- Persian journals dominate social sciences and humanities, while English journals are prevalent in medical and STEM fields.
- Local technological and financial adaptations (e.g., DOR system, peer review fees) compensate for sanctions and global isolation
- Only 1.8% of Persian-language journals are indexed in *Scopus*, compared to 30.4% of English-language ones.
- 639 journals were discontinued; patterns mirrored the disciplinary and linguistic distributions of active journals.

Local journals contribute to making a country's scientific output visible and accessible (Leta 2012). They are more likely to publish applied research closely linked to the local industrial sector (Sanz et al. 1995) and provide comprehensive coverage of research areas where a country holds a unique position (Ma 2019). Moreover, they tend to be preferred outlets for research addressing issues of local significance (Sivertsen 2016), and therefore, they are also more likely to be used in local policymaking (Jamali and Wakeling 2025a).

Iran presents an interesting context for exploring journal publishing outside the international publishing system. With a population of approximately 89 and 3.2 million university students (Tehran Times 2023), the country has a complex network of private, public and state-affiliated universities. The official language that is also the primary medium of education across all levels is Persian (Farsi). There is little known about journal publishing in Iran.

This research aims to contribute to a more inclusive understanding of global scholarly communication and potentially inform policy decisions for journal publishing improvement. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How many Iranian journals are currently published, and how are they distributed by language and subject area?
- How many journals have ceased publication and how has the number of Iranian journals changed over time?
- Which type of organisations owns these journals, and what type of publishers publish them?
- How many Iranian journals are indexed in *Scopus* and *Web of Science*?
- What is the OA publishing status of Iranian journals?

For the purposes of this study, Iranian journals are defined as those owned by or affiliated with an Iranian entity, such as a university, society, etc.

2 | Background on Iran

The first scholarly journal published in Iran was “*Roozname-ye Elmie-ye Elliye-ye Iran*” started on 11 January 1864 by the Ministry of Science. It included content related to all sciences in Persian, Arabic and French (Hoseini Pakdehi 1995). The second journal was ‘*Falahat-e Mozaffri*’ meaning agriculture, started in August 1900.

Research activity in Iran is predominantly concentrated within the higher education sector, primarily due to the limited R&D capacity of the private sector. Higher education is overseen by two main ministries:

- The Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT), which serves as the primary governing body for all non-medical state-run universities.
- The Ministry of Health and Medical Education is responsible for all state-run medical universities.

While most higher education institutions are state-run and tuition-free, Iran also has a significant private university, the Islamic Azad University, with over 400 branches across major cities and regions. This university is regulated by MSRT. Additionally, religious seminaries operate under their own distinct governing authority.

To establish a scholarly journal in Iran, institutions must obtain licences from two separate authorities. The first is the institution's own primary governing body, which varies depending on whether the publisher is a non-medical school, a medical school, an Islamic Azad University branch or a seminary (Ehteshamnejad et al. 2025). The second required licence comes from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG). This is because MCIG is responsible for registering all periodicals—including journals, magazines and newspapers—published in Iran, regardless of language.

3 | Literature Review

On the global scale a few old studies gave various estimations of the total number of scholarly journals including 50,000 journals in 1963 by Price (1963), 34,833 journals in 1993 by Brown (2003), 14,694 in 2003 based on Ulrich's by Mabe (2003) and 23,588 active refereed journals based on Ulrich's in 2007 by Morris (2007). Currently (as of 14 December 2024) UlrichsWeb database gives the number 50,874 as the figure for the number of active ‘academic/scholarly’, ‘refereed/peer-reviewer’ journals that are available online.

At individual country level, there are a few studies that give some indication of the scale and diversity of journal publishing. Nazarovets (2024) investigated scholarly journals in Ukraine and found that out of 1500 journal titles in Ulrichweb, 85% are published by universities, with 90% published in the Ukrainian language. Similarly, Gudiničius et al. (2023) examined academic journal publishers in Lithuania and identified 225 academic journals published by 73 different publishers in 2020. They noted that state-funded universities dominated journal publication, and approximately 20%

of journals charged publication fees. In Philippines, there were 777 scholarly journals but only 28 of them were listed in the master journal lists of Thomson Reuters, *Scopus* or both (Tecson-Mendoza 2015).

In the Australian context, Jamali et al. (2022a) conducted a comprehensive study revealing 651 active journals. Notably, 55.9% of these journals are affiliated with non-profit organisations like learned societies, and 39.8% are OA. The study also found that 326 Australian journals are indexed in *Scopus*, with 301 indexed in *Web of Science*. In another study, Jamali et al. (2022b) examined 140 Australian journals that discontinued from 2011 to mid-2021. The majority of them were from the arts, humanities and social sciences, and a lack of funding and quality submission were among the reasons for their discontinuation. In neighbouring New Zealand, an old study by Rowland (2005) showed that scholarly journals were primarily published by learned societies and non-profit organisations with a focus on subjects of particular economic interest. Interestingly, most New Zealand journals were small, with only one being OA.

Grgić (2014) analysed 231 Croatian journals and found a trend towards international orientation and publication by non-profit organisations. Shin (2012) studied 1437 journals in South Korea and observed that society publishers predominantly produce these journals, with more than half of the STM (Science, Technology and Medicine) journals being OA.

A few studies have focused on OA publishing. Raza et al. (2024) investigated 329 journals in Pakistan and found that 90% were OA, with two-thirds being diamond OA. In Sri Lanka, Ranasinghe and Chung (2019) identified 84 OA journals, with 81 published in English, primarily by universities (48%) and professional associations (40%). Björk (2019) arguing that the *Directory of Open Access Journals* (DOAJ) does not comprehensively cover non-English journals, used various other sources and found 437 OA journals published in the five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), with only 184 indexed in DOAJ. Slightly less than half of them (46%) had titles in one of the Nordic languages. Of those 181 indexed in DOAJ, 77 published English only, 77 published local language or a range of Nordic languages with English as an option, and 39 were local languages only.

National scholarly publishing systems vary substantially in size, structure and characteristics. Abdu (2023) surveyed 29 Nigerian universities and found 258 journals (nine per university on average) and on this basis estimated a potential total of around 2000 university-based journals in Nigeria. In China, Miao (2022) reported more than 6500 academic journals, with 5069 having Chinese titles and abstracts. Armenia presents a different picture, with Gzoyan et al. (2023) reporting 122 journals, of which only six are indexed in *Web of Science* or *Scopus*, with the majority published in the Armenian language and featuring English abstracts.

Navas-Fernández et al. (2018) investigated Spanish scholarly journals and found that subject area and access type significantly determine a journal's internationality. Laakso and Multas (2023) examined European scholarly journals and

showed that 36% publish OA, with funding models ranging from continuous subsidies to competitive grants.

In the case of Iran, there is no study published in the English language. However, an old PhD thesis which generated an article in Persian (Pashaeizad et al. 2011) reported that there were 530 journals published in Iran that were recognised by the two ministries in charge of education, mostly by universities, and only 40% of them provided online access to full-text articles, and 353 of them were in the Persian language. A more recent study examined 347 non-medical journals ranked 'A' by MSRT to determine the extent to which they meet the evaluation criteria of *Web of Science* and *Scopus*. It found several issues, including 94 journals that did not use DOIs, a lack of diversity in authorship, an absence of international editorial board members, and inadequate author guidelines.

In summary, there seems to be a lack of research on non-English journals and on publishing outside Europe and the USA. This current study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by exploring the journal publishing landscape in Iran, a developing Middle Eastern country, in an attempt to address this research gap.

4 | Method

There is not a single up-to-date authoritative list of all Iranian journals. After consulting Ulrich's Global Serials Directory, we decided not to use it as it is not complete and moreover, it gives translated or transliterated titles for journals (instead of the actual title in Persian script) which makes it very difficult to verify the information against Iranian sources. We used a combination of a few sources (with some overlap) to collect information about journals and then crosschecked various sources and finally inspected each journal's website to ensure the information was accurate and up-to-date. The lists we used are:

- [Magiran.com](https://magiran.com) (2987 journals): a database by the private sector that lists most of the Iranian journals. It is free to use for searching and viewing, but it also has a paid version that provides access to full-text articles of all journals, magazines and newspapers.
- Iranian Research Information System (Irisweb.ir) (2440 journals): a database by a private company that also develops a popular journal management system (Yektaweb). It uses automated methods to collect journals' information.
- Islamic Azad University journal evaluation (IAUJE) system (<https://eval.journals.iau.ir>) (532 journals): the authority of Islamic Azad University that approves and gives permission to various branches of the university for publishing journals.

Python scripts for web scraping were used to collect basic information these lists provide on each journal. Then each journal's website, if available, was inspected to determine if it was active or not and if so to collect and verify information on parent body/owner, publisher if different, start year, end year (if discontinued), frequency, language(s), OA status, article processing charges

(APC), use of DOI, subject area. For subject classification we used the top six categories from the *Fields of Science and Technology* (OECD 2007). To assign subjects, we matched the subject area of the journal to the specific fields listed under each broad category. Moreover, two of the lists mentioned above assign subjects to journals that were helpful in our subject categorisation.

We also downloaded the list of Iranian journals indexed in *Web of Science* and *Scopus* and compared it against the list we collected to note in which database they were indexed.

To determine whether a journal was active or discontinued, we used a multi-step approach. Initially, we identified journals with a publication delay of 2 years or more as potentially discontinued. Journals with delays exceeding 3 years were classified as discontinued without further verification. For journals with delays between 2 and 3 years, we contacted the journal office directly to confirm their publication status. Journals where the office was unresponsive were classified as ceased.

During data collection, we identified five active French-language journals, one active Russian-language journal, one discontinued French-language journal and one discontinued Russian-language journal. These journals focus exclusively on language and literature studies and are published by academic departments or language-related societies (e.g., the Iranian Association of Russian Language and Literature). Due to their small number, these journals were excluded from all subsequent analyses.

5 | Findings

Figures 1 and 2 together illustrate the volume of journal publishing in Iran by depicting both journal entry and exit over time (1990–2025) and accumulative number. The number of Persian-language journals saw a significant increase in the early 2000s, peaking around 2009 (with 167 new journals),

followed by a gradual decline in growth. As we explain later, this increase was most likely due to an increase in the student population, particularly postgraduate students. In contrast, English-language journals experienced more modest but steady growth, reaching a peak around 2012 (with 79 new journals) before their growth slowed down. It should be noted that journals might be older than 1990 and several journals changed title or were split into a few journals. In total, currently there are 2282 active Persian and 946 active English journals. Since 2000, a total of 639 journals discontinued (shown as dashed lines in Figure 1), including 520 Persian, 111 English and eight Arabic-language journals.

The chart starts in 1990 to show the growth rate rather than the age of journals. Arabic journals are not included in the Figures in order to improve visual clarity, as their numbers are very small in comparison, with a total number of 30 journals including 22 current active journals and eight discontinued journals. As shown in Figure 2, the cumulative number of active journals (accounting for closures) increased sharply between 2008 and 2016 for both Persian and English-language journals. Although growth slowed after 2016, the total number of journals never declined. The number of Persian- and English-language journals increased from 70 and 24 in 1990 to 2282 and 946 in 2025, respectively.

5.1 | Subject Areas

The data in Table 1 reveals notable differences in disciplinary focus between the two language groups. Social science is the most prevalent subject area at 31.9%, contrasting with multidisciplinary journals, which make up just 0.9% of the total. English-language journals are predominantly concentrated in the medical and health sciences (43%), followed by natural sciences (17.7%) and engineering and technology (14.6%). In contrast, Persian-language journals are most prevalent in the social sciences (41.4%) and humanities (22.9%), with a significantly smaller share dedicated to

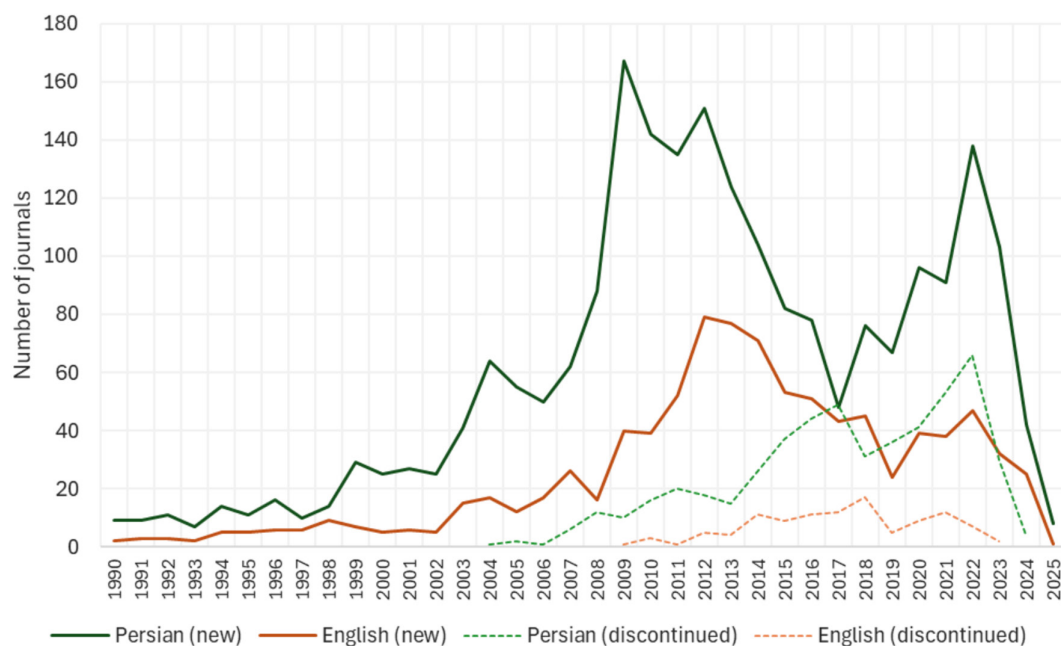


FIGURE 1 | Annual number of new and discontinued Persian- and English-language journals in Iran, 1990–2025.

medical and health sciences (9.1%). Agricultural sciences also have a higher proportion of Persian-language journals (9.6%) compared to English-language ones (5.9%). All Arabic journals are from humanities as these journals are either about Islamic studies or about Arabic language and literature. These figures to some extent reflect the publishing behaviour of researchers in those fields. Researchers in STEM are more likely to publish in English than researchers in social sciences and humanities. Moreover, the topics in STEM are less likely to have a local aspect.

5.2 | Parent Bodies and Owners

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of journals based on their ownership. The data indicates significant variations in the

institutional affiliations of journals published in each language. Non-medical public universities publish slightly more than a third (35.9%) of all journals. Among English-language journals, medical universities account for the largest share (29.8%), followed closely by non-medical universities (27.9%). In contrast, non-medical universities dominate Persian-language journal publishing (39.2%), while medical universities contribute a much smaller portion (5.5%). Research institutes and centres play a more prominent role in Persian-language publishing (15.4%) compared to English (9.2%). Similarly, private universities publish a notable share of journals in both languages, though their contribution is slightly higher in Persian (15.1%) than in English (13.8%). Societies and associations, government institutions and religious seminaries all have a stronger presence in Persian-language publishing.

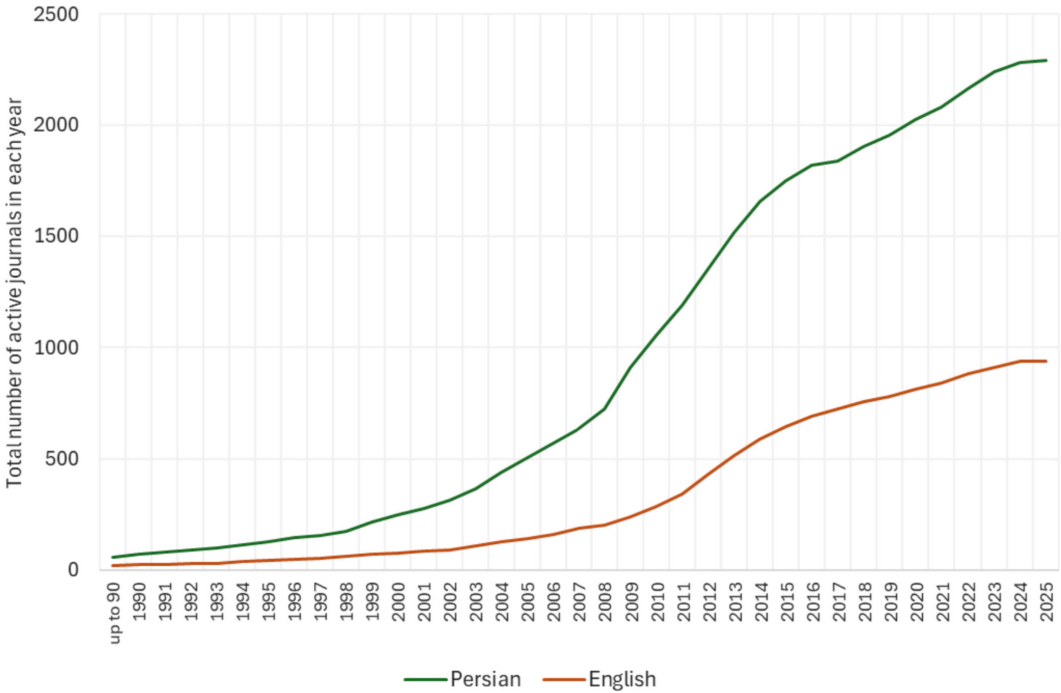


FIGURE 2 | Cumulative number of active Persian- and English-language journals in Iran, 1990–2025.

TABLE 1 | Subject area of Iranian journals by language.

	English journals		Persian journals		Arabic journals		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Natural sciences	167	17.7	132	5.8	0	0	299	9.2
Engineering and technology	138	14.6	232	10.2	0	0	370	11.4
Medical and health sciences	407	43.0	208	9.1	0	0	615	18.9
Agricultural sciences	56	5.9	219	9.6	0	0	275	8.5
Social sciences	92	9.7	945	41.4	0	0	1037	31.9
Humanities	82	8.7	522	22.9	22	100	626	19.3
Multidisciplinary	4	0.4	24	1.1	0	0	28	0.9
Total	946	100	2282	100	22	100	3250	100

6 | Partnership With Publishers

The only major international commercial publisher that has partnership with a few ($N=25$) of Iranian English journals is Springer-Nature. This type of partnership is hindered by international sanctions as any partnership requires banking transactions. Given difficulty in this area, an Iranian publisher registered in the Netherlands named Brieflands ([Brieflands.com](https://brieflands.com)) publishes 48 of Iranian English journals. Other than these two, there are other very small commercial companies that offer publishing services inside Iran. Such services are limited, and the sheer majority of journals are self-published using a platform (as discussed below) and some support from their parent body, which is usually a domain and web hosting support from their university.

6.1 | Journal Platforms

Iranian journals use a variety of *Journal Management Systems* (JMS) to handle the editorial workflow, including manuscript

submission, peer review, editing and publication. These systems also generate reports and operational statistics—such as acceptance rates and time to publication—some of which are publicly displayed on journal websites to enhance transparency. The most widely used system is Sinaweb, a locally developed platform used by more than half (59.3%) of all journals, including nearly half of the English-language journals (46%), nearly two-thirds of Persian journals (64.6%), and the vast majority of Arabic journals (77.3%). Yektaweb, another domestic system designed to support right-to-left (RTL) languages like Persian and Arabic, is the second most common platform, used by 13.3% of English, 14.4% of Persian and 9.1% of Arabic journals (see Table 3). These two are the main competitor domestic solutions. Raimag, also developed in Iran, follows closely with similar usage levels. While OJS—an internationally developed open-source platform—is used by 11.3% of English-language journals, its adoption among Persian and Arabic journals is minimal to nonexistent, likely due to limited RTL support. The OJS use also includes versions of OJS that have been further developed and customised by local companies to make it more suitable for native language and use (e.g., MaadIran version). NeoScriber

TABLE 2 | Ownership of Iranian journals by language.

	English journals		Persian journals		Arabic journals		Total	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Non-medical public universities	264	27.9	894	39.2	10	45.5	1168	35.9
Medical public universities	282	29.8	126	5.5	0	0	408	12.6
Private universities	131	13.8	344	15.1	3	13.6	478	14.7
Hospitals	2	0.2	1	0.0	0	0	3	0.1
Societies/associations	93	9.8	217	9.5	1	4.5	311	9.6
Government institutions	8	0.8	119	5.2	0	0	127	3.9
Research Inst./Centre	87	9.2	352	15.4	5	22.7	444	13.7
Religious seminaries	4	0.4	69	3.0	3	13.6	76	2.3
Other	75	7.9	160	7.0	0	0	235	7.2
Total	946	100	2282	100	22	100	3250	100

TABLE 3 | Journal management systems used by Iranian journals.

	English journals		Persian journals		Arabic journals		Total	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Sinaweb	435	46.0	1474	64.6	17	77.3	1926	59.3
Yektaweb	126	13.3	328	14.4	2	9.1	456	14.0
Raimag	108	11.4	343	15.0	3	13.6	454	14.0
OJS	107	11.3	17	0.7	0	0	124	3.8
NeoScriber	48	5.1	0	0.0	0	0	48	1.5
Others	122	12.9	120	5.3	0	0	242	7.4
Total	946	100	2282	100	22	100	3250	100

appears exclusively among English journals, and a number of journals (particularly English ones) use a range of other platforms, including in-house or proprietary systems, grouped here under ‘Others.’

This distribution reflects the importance of local solutions in Iran's scholarly publishing ecosystem, especially for Persian and Arabic language journals, which require robust RTL support—something most international JMS platforms do not fully accommodate.

6.2 | Indexation

Indexation plays a significant role in Iran's academic publishing landscape, largely due to its influence on research performance evaluations in Iranian universities. Publishing in indexed journals—particularly those in *Web of Science* (WoS) and *Scopus*—is strongly incentivised, with WoS journals receiving the highest weight, followed by *Scopus*-indexed journals. As a result, many journals, including those published in Persian, actively pursue strategies to meet indexation criteria. These include adding extended English abstracts (sometimes up to 500 words) at the beginning of each article, assigning DOIs to published papers and inviting international scholars to serve on editorial boards.

The data (Table 4) show that 30.4% of English-language journals published in Iran are indexed in *Scopus*, compared to only 1.8% of Persian-language journals. Similarly, 10.5% of English journals are indexed in the *Web of Science* Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI), while just 0.2% of Persian journals appear there. Only a small number of Iranian English journals (3.4%) are indexed in the core *Web of Science* collections (Science Citation Index Expanded, Social Sciences Citation Index, or Arts & Humanities Citation Index), and no Persian-language journals are included in these core collections. In total, 14.4% (466 out of 3228) of Persian- and English-language journals are indexed in the two major databases. Arabic journals are excluded from the table as none are indexed in the selected databases.

Domestically, there are a few databases that index all or most Iranian journals and provide search and metrics services. The main one that is the Iranian citation index is maintained by ISC (<https://search.isc.ac/>). ISC is selective and journals need to

meet certain quality criteria to make it into the database. The second one is Scientific Information Database (SID: <https://sid.ir/en/>) that does not have selection criteria as long as journals are valid and published with relevant permissions from authorities. There is also a commercial database named [Magiran.com](https://magiran.com) that indexes all periodicals (any journal, magazine, newspaper, etc.) and provides search and browse (free) and full-text access (paid) for libraries and universities.

In terms of evaluation, MSRT has its own evaluation system for journals that is a point-based system that ranks journals as either ‘International’ (highest rank) or from A to E (A being top domestic rank). The evaluation uses quality criteria publishing best practices such as regular and on-time publication, inclusion of English abstract, prestige of editorial board and so on.

6.3 | Use of DOI

Having a digital identifier is encouraged both by ISC and MSRT for inclusion in the database or evaluation purposes. However, Iranian journals have faced difficulties in obtaining DOIs due to international sanctions and Crossref's inability to provide service to Iranian entities. Some journals in the early 2010s used companies in Dubai (e.g., [knowledgee.com](https://www.knowledgee.com)) to obtain DOI. Later, some other Iranian companies managed to use services such as [medra.org](https://www.medra.org) for this purpose. These challenges encourage Iranian research authorities to develop an alternative. A domestic alternative called Digital Object Recognizer (DOR) was developed (<https://dor.isc.ac/>) and launched in February 2022 by the Islamic World Science and Technology Monitoring and Citation Institute (ISC), an organisation under the Ministry of Science that monitors scientific output and also publishes the Islamic World Science Citation Database. Since its launch, many journals have adopted DOR—some use it alongside DOI. In recent years, a few private companies have found ways to bypass the sanctions and now help Iranian journals obtain DOIs for a fee.

Among English-language journals, the vast majority (94%, $N=889$) assign DOIs to their articles. DOI usage is much lower in Persian-language journals, where 67.7% ($N=1544$) provide DOIs. Among Arabic-language journals, 16 (72.7%) have DOIs. English journals are generally more active in obtaining and assigning DOIs, likely because it helps with attracting submissions and getting indexed in major international databases.

6.4 | OA Status

Table 5 presents the distribution of journals based on their OA model. The data highlights distinct differences in OA practices between the language groups. Among English-language journals, the majority (69.9%) follow the Diamond OA model, which does not charge publication fees for either authors or readers, while 27.5% adopt the Gold OA model, requiring APC. A small proportion (2.6%) operate under a hybrid model, offering both subscription-based and open-access options. The hybrid journals are those outsourced to Springer publishing. In contrast, Persian-language journals mostly favour the Gold OA model (54.6%), with Diamond OA accounting for 45.4% of the total. Hybrid OA is absent among

TABLE 4 | Indexation of Iranian journals in international databases by language.

	English journals		Persian journals		Total	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
<i>Scopus</i>	288	30.4	42	1.8	330	10.2
<i>Web of Science</i> Core (excluding ESCI)	32	3.4	0	0	32	1
<i>Web of Science</i> ESCI	99	10.5	5	0.2	104	3.2
Total	419	44.3	47	2	466	14.4

Persian journals as there is no commercial publisher involved and no market for subscription. Overall, out of all journals, 99.2% are OA with Diamond OA being slightly more popular than Gold OA (52.7% compared to 46.6%).

6.5 | APC

Gold and hybrid journals charge APCs, but APCs in Iranian journals are more complex than in mainstream international journals for two main reasons: currency and the structure of charges. Persian and Arabic journals accept payments in Iranian Rials (IRR), as their authors are all based inside Iran. English-language journals, however, vary. Some only accept payment in foreign currencies—usually USD and occasionally GBP or Euro—depending on the journal owner's international network and where they can maintain a bank account.

It's important to note that current economic sanctions prohibit international banks from transacting with Iran. As a result, any money transfer to or from Iran occurs outside the banking system, typically through exchange offices or informal means. Some English-language journals accept IRR from Iranian authors and a foreign currency from international authors.

Due to these currency restrictions and sanctions, the Iranian Rial (IRR) has experienced severe devaluation in recent years. For example, in January 2022, 1 USD equalled 290,000 IRR, while by April 2025, it had reached 1,000,000 IRR per USD. We used this latter rate (IRR to USD = 0.000001) for all conversions presented here. To provide further context, the average monthly salary of a newly recruited assistant professor at an Iranian university is about \$240 with this exchange rate.

Table 6 shows the range of APCs charged by different types of journals. The six Arabic journals that charge APCs have an average fee of \$12.30 (median = \$6.50). Among Persian journals, 1244 charge APCs, but the fee information was not located for 45 of them. For the rest, the average APC is \$7.80, with a median of \$6.

For English-language journals that charge in IRR or offer both IRR and a foreign currency option ($N=196$), the APC ranges from \$1 to \$110, with a mean of \$7.20 and a median of \$13.30. Among those that charge only in foreign currency or in IRR and foreign currency ($N=129$), fees range from \$30 to \$2664, with a mean of \$400. The high-end fee belongs to hybrid journals published by Springer. Notably, 26 English-language journals charge APCs only to Iranian authors, offering free publication to international authors. This may be intended to encourage international submissions or may simply reflect the journal owners' inability to process international payments.

Another layer of complexity lies in what the APC covers. Unlike the international norm—where a single APC is paid after peer review and upon acceptance—many Iranian journals charge in two instalments. The first payment is made at submission and typically covers the cost of peer review. A key difference is that many Iranian journals pay their peer reviewers, and this fee is non-refundable even if the manuscript is rejected. This first instalment usually amounts to about one-third of the total APC.

Paying for peer review is not limited to journals that charge APCs. Some journals that receive financial support from their parent institutions also pay reviewers. This practice is much more common in Persian and Arabic journals than in

TABLE 5 | Open access models by publication language.

	English journals		Persian journals		Arabic journals		Total	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Gold OA	260	27.5	1244	54.5	6	27.3	1510	46.5
Diamond OA	661	69.9	1038	45.5	16	72.7	1715	52.7
Hybrid	25	2.6	0	0	0	0	25	0.8
Total	946	100	2282	100	22	100	3250	100

TABLE 6 | Details of APC fees of Iranian journals (gold OA and hybrid journals).

	<i>N</i>	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Unknown
Arabic	6	IRR 5,000,000 (\$5)	IRR 30,000,000 (\$30)	IRR 12,333,330 (\$12.30)	IRR 6500,000 (\$6.50)	0
Persian	1244	IRR 500,000 (\$0.50)	IRR 80,000,000 (\$80)	IRR 7,781,910 (\$7.80)	IRR 6,000,000 (\$6)	45
English, IRR currency	196	IRR 1,000,000 (\$1)	IRR 110,000,000 (\$110)	IRR 7,200,000 (\$7.20)	IRR 13,311,650 (\$13.30)	7
English, foreign currency	129	\$30	\$2664	\$400	\$484	—

English-language ones, largely because there are no practical means of transferring money to international reviewers from within Iran.

The fee that journals pay for a peer review starts as low as 50cents and can go up to around \$4, though many pay approximately \$1. These relatively small payments are meant to acknowledge reviewers' time, as editors themselves typically work on a voluntary basis and are not compensated.

The second payment is due upon acceptance and covers production costs such as proofreading, formatting and DOI assignment. Some journals provide a detailed breakdown of these charges on their websites. For example, the first instalment may include editorial checks and plagiarism screening, in addition to peer review, while the second covers final editing, typesetting, database indexing and DOI registration. A few journals charge an extra fee if a third reviewer is needed due to disagreement between the initial two. Some also offer optional services like English editing or writing the abstract in English for a fee. Particularly in STEM journals, an optional fast-track peer review service is available, which involves a higher first-payment fee.

The practice of charging APCs increased in the late 2010s and has expanded significantly over the last decade, as institutional financial support for journals has diminished. A key reason is the shift to online publishing in Iran, where there is no subscription market and thus no revenue stream. Most journal owners—mainly higher education institutions—provide minimal financial support, leaving journals with no option but to pass costs on to authors.

It should be noted that as higher education is regulated, MSRT issued a regulation on 21 April 2022 determining a cap for APC which was 15,000,000 IRR (\$15) for journals that are evaluated by this ministry.

6.6 | Discontinued Journals

We found a total of 639 discontinued journals, including 520 Persian, 111 English and eight Arabic-language journals. Tables 7 and 8 show that discontinued journals are unevenly

distributed across subjects and ownership types (journals' two main characteristics), with clear differences between English- and Persian-language titles. Among Persian-language journals, discontinuation is heavily concentrated in the social sciences and humanities, which together account for more than half of all closures. In contrast, discontinued English-language journals are more strongly represented in the medical, health and natural sciences. The subject distribution of ceased journals follows the same patterns seen in active journals for each language.

In terms of ownership, most discontinued journals in both language groups were published by public universities, particularly non-medical universities. Persian-language journal discontinuations are also relatively common among research institutes and government-affiliated publishers, while English-language journal closures are more evenly distributed across ownership types, including private universities. Similar to subject distribution, the ownership types of discontinued journals reflect those of active journals in each language.

7 | Discussion and Conclusions

We presented here the first comprehensive analysis of the Iranian journal publishing landscape. The data reveals a diverse multilingual ecosystem that includes 3250 journals (946 English, 2282 Persian and 22 Arabic). This diversity is considerably greater than what is represented in major international databases like *Scopus* and *Web of Science*, which predominantly index English-language journals. Our findings align with research by Khanna et al. (2022), which highlighted the substantial underrepresentation of non-English journals in major databases.

The temporal analysis reveals interesting trends in journal establishment patterns. We think a few factors have contributed to this trend. First, Iran's population witnessed a high birth rate in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Roudi et al. 2017), and those who were born in that period reached university age in the 2000s. Another factor is the massive increase in the number of postgraduate students during Ahmadinejad's presidency (2005–2013), as he particularly doubled the number of PhD student positions in Iranian universities (Golkar 2012). In most Iranian

TABLE 7 | Subject area of discontinued Iranian journals by language.

	English journals		Persian journals		Arabic journals		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Natural sciences	26	23.4	34	6.5	0	0	60	9.4
Engineering and technology	13	11.7	50	9.6	0	0	63	9.9
Medical and health sciences	40	36.0	55	10.6	0	0	95	14.9
Agricultural sciences	6	5.4	60	11.5	0	0	66	10.3
Social sciences	14	12.6	181	34.8	0	0	195	30.5
Humanities	12	10.8	126	24.2	8	100	146	22.8
Multidisciplinary	0	0	14	2.7	0	0	14	2.2
Total	111	100	520	100	8	100	639	100

TABLE 8 | Ownership of discontinued Iranian journals by language.

	English journals		Persian journals		Arabic journals		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Non-medical public universities	39	35.1	204	39.2	2	25	245	38.3
Medical public universities	22	19.8	24	4.6	0	0	46	7.2
Private universities	19	17.1	69	13.3	0	0	88	13.8
Hospitals	0	0.0	1	0.2	0	0	1	0.2
Societies/associations	6	5.4	26	5.0	0	0	32	5.0
Government institutions	2	1.8	43	8.3	3	37.5	48	7.5
Research Inst./Centre	9	8.1	75	14.4	2	25	86	13.5
Religious seminaries	0	0.0	16	3.1	1	12.5	17	2.7
Other	14	12.6	62	11.9	0	0	76	11.9
Total	111	100	520	100	8	100	639	100

universities, submitting a paper to a journal is a common condition for a PhD student's viva. Moreover, similar to some other countries such as Turkey (Besir Demir 2018), Iranian universities have a monetary reward system for publishing articles in international journals that explains the motivation of Iranian journals for being indexed in major databases.

The distribution of journals across subject areas shows distinct patterns between language groups. While English-language journals primarily focus on medical and health sciences (43%), Persian journals predominantly cover social sciences (41.4%) and humanities (22.9%). This pattern may reflect both disciplinary cultures and publishing priorities. In STEM disciplines, where research is less likely to have a local focus and more likely to have international relevance (Jamali et al. 2022a), international visibility and knowledge exchange are particularly valued, and therefore, researchers are more likely to publish in English. In contrast, social sciences and humanities often address locally relevant issues and cultural contexts, making Persian the more appropriate medium of communication. This disciplinary divide mirrors findings from other national contexts, such as Björk's (2019) study of Nordic journals, which noted similar patterns of language choice across disciplines.

The institutional affiliation of journals reveals important insights into Iran's scholarly publishing ecosystem. The dominance of universities as journal owners (71.5% of English journals and 59.8% of Persian journals) resembles patterns observed in other countries like Ukraine (Nazarovets 2024) and Lithuania (Gudinavičius et al. 2023). However, unlike many Western countries where commercial publishers play significant roles, Iranian journals are predominantly owned by public institutions. This ownership pattern affects financial sustainability, as evidenced by the widespread adoption of APCs, especially among Persian-language journals (54.5% use Gold OA). The practice of charging for peer review represents an interesting adaptation to financial constraints, though the ethics and implications of this approach deserve further investigation (e.g., the impact of publishing speed), especially in light of recent

research suggesting that monetary incentives may influence peer review completion rates (Cotton et al. 2025).

The use of domestically developed journal management systems like Sinaweb and Yektaweb, rather than international platforms like OJS or proprietary solutions, highlights the importance of technological solutions tailored to local linguistic needs, especially for right-to-left languages with non-Roman alphabets. This technological adaptation represents an important aspect of maintaining publishing sovereignty as well as meeting international standards.

The APC structure in Iranian journals presents a complex picture that differs significantly from international norms. The two-installment payment system, with separate fees for peer review and publication, represents an adaptation to local economic conditions and the lack of subscription revenue. The wide range of APCs, particularly in English journals that charge in foreign currencies, reflects the stratified nature of the publishing landscape and the challenges of operating within a sanctioned economy. As research by Sohani et al. (2024) has shown, publishing in international OA journals is a financial burden for Iranian scholars and universities, especially given the economic situation of the country.

The analysis of 631 discontinued journals reveals patterns that largely reflect the characteristics of active journals in Iran's publishing ecosystem. The predominance of social sciences and humanities among discontinued Persian-language titles mirrors their dominance among active Persian journals. Similarly, the concentration of discontinued English-language journals in medical and health sciences reflects active publishing patterns, though the relatively higher discontinuation rates in these fields may warrant further investigation into sustainability challenges specific to medical journal publishing. The ownership distribution of ceased journals parallels that of active journals, with public universities accounting for the majority of closures in both language groups. This suggests that discontinuation is not driven by a particular type of publisher but rather affects the ecosystem broadly.

Further research is needed to understand the reasons for journal discontinuation and to develop targeted support mechanisms. We propose that two factors play key roles in journal closures: institutional support for journals and researcher demand for publishing outlets. Demand is influenced by the size and composition of the research workforce (e.g., the number of postgraduate students) and institutional regulations (e.g., whether publishing in a journal is a requirement for PhD completion). Attracting quality submissions and adequate institutional support have been found to be among the challenges faced by local journals elsewhere, including in Australia (Jamali and Wakeling 2025b; Jamali et al. 2026).

The indexation patterns reveal significant disparities, with English journals much more likely to be indexed in international databases (30.4% in *Scopus*) compared to Persian journals (1.8%). This disparity contributes to the invisibility of local scholarship in global metrics and evaluations. These findings echo Salager-Meyer's (2008) observations about the challenges facing scholarly publishing in developing countries, and the need for strengthening multilingual publishing.

Geopolitical factors and sanctions, in particular, have had a profound effect, limiting access to international platforms and services such as DOI registration, international manuscript management systems and partnerships with global publishers. In response, Iran has developed local infrastructures, such as the Domestic Object Recognizer (DOR) system and domestic manuscript submission platforms, which demonstrate both innovation and resilience in the face of isolation.

The study has a few limitations worth acknowledging. First, despite our best efforts to create a comprehensive list of Iranian journals by cross-checking multiple sources, some journals may have been missed, particularly those that lack an online presence or have recently ceased publication without clear documentation. Second, our data collection relied heavily on information available on journal websites, which can vary and, in some cases, might not be up to date. Third, the classification of journals into subject areas followed broad disciplinary categories, which may oversimplify the interdisciplinary nature of many publications. Fourth, while we attempted to verify the OA status and APC information for all journals, the rapidly changing economic conditions in Iran (and the wildly fluctuating exchange rate) mean that fee structures might have changed during the data collection period.

Future research could explore the qualitative aspects of journal publishing in Iran, including challenges of publishing journals, reasons for ceasing publication and closures, and the support structure available through parent bodies for journals. Survey and interview of editors of both active and discontinued journals will help gain in-depth insight into the publishing ecosystem.

In conclusion, our study contributes to a more inclusive understanding of global scholarly communication and potentially informs policy decisions for journal publishing improvement, especially at local and national levels. There might also be lessons for other countries and international publishing, as ideas such as paying reviewers that are yet to be thoroughly experimentally tested (Cotton et al. 2025) are the norm in some

countries such as Iran. Non-English journals and those from developing countries are under-represented in international databases. Disciplinary distribution across language groups and institutional ownership patterns reveals distinct roles journals play in each country. Iran's journal publishing system offers a compelling example of how structural barriers—linguistic, economic and political—can generate locally adapted models of scholarly communication. The discontinuation of 639 journals over the study period indicates that these barriers create challenges not only for new journal establishment but also for long-term sustainability, highlighting the challenging operating conditions many journals face. As debates about decolonising knowledge persist, such cases demand closer attention.

Author Contributions

Hamid R. Jamali: conceptualization, writing – original draft, methodology, validation, investigation, formal analysis, writing – review and editing. **Ebrahim Emrani:** validation, investigation, formal analysis, writing – review and editing. **Majid Nabavi:** methodology, writing – original draft, investigation, formal analysis, writing – review and editing, validation. **Mozhgan Oroji:** validation, investigation, formal analysis, writing – review and editing.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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