

# "An Urgent Case for Gold Open Access Publishing in LMICs: A Nepal-India Perspective"

Raju Vaishya<sup>1</sup>, Abhishek Vaish<sup>1</sup>, Sailendra Kumar Duwal Shrestha<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Orthopedics, Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals, New Delhi, India

<sup>2</sup> Editor-in-chief, Medical Journal of Armed Police Force Nepal, Balambu, Kathmandu, Nepal

## Online Access



DOI: 10.64772/mjapfn39

Scholarly publishing today encompasses several distinct models, each offering different levels of accessibility and reuse. Traditional subscription publishing places the final article behind a 'paywall', limiting access to institutions or individuals with paid subscriptions. In contrast, Open Access (OA) models make articles freely available, but differ in how rights and access are granted. These models represent a spectrum of accessibility and sustainability options, shaping how knowledge is disseminated, shared, and used worldwide.

## OA publication models

There are five main types of OA journals, based on different levels of accessibility<sup>1,2</sup>:

- *Gold OA* provides immediate, free access to the final published version on the journal's website, usually under a Creative Commons licence, and often supported by article processing charges (APCs).
- *Hybrid OA* operates within subscription journals, allowing authors to make individual articles open by paying an APC, creating a mixed content environment.
- *Green OA* enables authors to self-archive a preprint or postprint version in institutional or subject repositories, sometimes after an

embargo period.

- *Bronze OA* refers to articles made free-to-read on a publisher's site without an explicit open licence, offering access but not reuse rights.
- *Diamond or Platinum OA*, increasingly popular in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs), provides immediate OA without APCs, being fully supported by institutions, societies, or governments.

The global rise of OA publishing has transformed scientific communication, and its relevance for LMICs such as Nepal and India cannot be overstated. Gold OA offers a powerful means to democratize knowledge. Mounting bibliometric evidence indicates that Gold OA articles often enjoy significantly higher citation rates and contribute to elevated Journal Impact Factors (JIF) compared with subscription-only publications; a benefit that is especially consequential for the research landscape in Nepal and India.

## Evidence in favour of OA publishing

A large-scale analysis using OA Digital Object Identifier (DOI) data on 67 million articles showed that approximately 28% of all scholarly literature is openly accessible, rising to 45% for articles published in 2015, with growth driven by Gold and Hybrid OA.<sup>3</sup> Using samples

### How to cite (Vancouver Style)

Vaishya R, Vaish A, Shrestha S. "An Urgent Case for Gold Open Access Publishing in LMICs: A Nepal-India Perspective". Med J APF Nepal. 2026;2(1):I-III.

© The Author(s) 2025 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. (CC BY-NC)



of 100,000 articles from Crossref, Web of Science (WoS), and Unpaywall users, the study found that readers encounter OA at high rates, with 47% of viewed articles being OA, much of it through Bronze OA, where publishers make articles free to read without an open license. The analysis also confirms an 18% citation advantage for OA articles, particularly for Green and Hybrid OA, emphasising the need for continued research and policy development using the freely available OA DOI platform.<sup>3</sup>

This citation benefit is not limited to anecdotal reports. A systematic review of 134 studies investigating the OA Citation Advantage (OACA) found mixed results: 47.80% reported a clear citation benefit for OA articles.<sup>4</sup> Evidence from hybrid journals further strengthens the case; a large cross-sectional analysis of hybrid journals in Clinical Medicine (498–1328 journals from the Journal Citation Reports (of 2018 to 2021) found that hybrid Gold OA articles consistently received more citations (1.30–1.45 times) than subscription articles. Using data on citable items and citation counts across 59 categories, the study showed that hybrid Gold OA articles are cited 30–45% more often, suggesting that the increased citations derive substantially from access rather than journal prestige alone.<sup>5</sup>

### Mechanisms making OA valuable for LMICs

- Gold OA eliminates paywalls, enabling researchers, clinicians, and policymakers in resource-constrained settings to access the latest research without institutional subscription. In Nepal, where many hospitals, training centres, and remote clinics lack robust library infrastructure, freely available literature can make the difference between evidence-informed decision-making and reliance on outdated or second-hand summaries.
- The OA content is more discoverable. Because open articles are fully crawlable by search engines (e.g., Google Scholar) and indexing services (e.g., Scopus, PubMed), they benefit from greater visibility. Permissive Creative Commons licensing (often CC-BY) further promotes redistribution, text mining, translation, and reuse; features that boost shareability across academic, policy, and educational networks.<sup>6</sup>
- The role of funder and institutional mandates cannot be ignored. Many international and national funding agencies now require OA publication, resulting in a concentration of well-funded, high-quality research in Gold or hybrid OA venues. For authors in Nepal and India, this means their work, when compliant with funder mandates, is more likely to reach the widest

possible audience rapidly.

- The OA journals often enable rapid peer review, early online posting, and “continuous publication” models. This means new research appears without delay, allowing more time for citations to accumulate within common metric windows such as the two-year timeframe used by many JIF calculations.
- The OA helps a broader interdisciplinary and societal reach. Freely available research can be accessed by clinicians, public health workers, educators, and policymakers who otherwise might lack access, thereby enhancing cross-disciplinary citations and real-world impact.

### Challenges with Gold OA publishing

Gold OA is not without its challenges, especially in LMIC contexts. The most commonly cited barrier is APCs.<sup>7</sup> For many high-impact OA journals, APCs are prohibitively expensive. Yet, many publishers now offer waivers or steep discounts for authors from Nepal and India. Strengthening and promoting regional OA journals by including society-run or university-based platforms is a strategic priority to ensure equity in participation and visibility without overburdening researchers financially.

### Strategies to enhance the research capacity in LMICs

A strategic, well-structured funding is a critical catalyst for advancing biomedical research, driving innovation, improving research quality, and strengthening national research ecosystems. There is an urgent need for transparent allocation mechanisms, capacity building, and sustained investment to maximise scientific output and societal impact.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the strategies to address the global disparities in biomedical research are required to empower researchers in LMICs, through targeted training, international collaborations, mentorship, and digital learning platforms to help LMICs bridge the gap with high-income countries (HICs) and participate more equitably in global scientific progress.<sup>9</sup>

An initiative of the Indian government’s “One Nation, One Subscription” (ONOS) (<https://www.onos.gov.in/>), launched in January 2025, provides free access to over 13,000 international journals for students, faculty, and researchers at over 6,300 government institutions. This initiative allows access to scholarly articles from 30 major publishers through a unified portal. While the initial phase focuses on government institutions, future phases may include private institutions and public libraries for wider access. Similar models can be adapted by other

LMICs to help the researchers get free and wide access to the research material.

## Conclusions

For the *Medical Journal of Armed Police Force, Nepal*, the implications are especially timely. By embracing a Gold OA model, the journal can increase its global reach, enhance its citation footprint, and amplify the voices of Nepali and Indian researchers. Such a move would support frontline clinicians and public health professionals across LMICs to access the best available evidence without financial or institutional barriers. It would also provide a high-quality, locally governed outlet for regional research, boosting its adoption and impact in both academic and policy domains.

## References

1. Robinson-Garcia N, Costas R, van Leeuwen TN. Open Access Uptake by Universities Worldwide. *PeerJ*. 2020;8:e9410. DOI: [10.7717/peerj.9410](https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.9410)
2. Quaia E, Zanon C, Vieira A, Loewe C, Marti-Bonmati L. Publishing in Open Access Journals. *Insights Imaging*. 2024;15(1):212. DOI: [10.1186/s13244-024-01794-6](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13244-024-01794-6)
3. Piwowar H, Priem J, Larivière V, Alperin JP, Matthias L, Norlander B, et al. The State of OA: A Large-Scale Analysis of the Prevalence and Impact of Open Access Articles. *PeerJ*. 2018;6:e4375. DOI: [10.7717/peerj.4375](https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.4375)
4. Langham-Putrow A, Bakker C, Riegelman A. Is the Open Access Citation Advantage Real? A Systematic Review of the Citation of Open Access and Subscription-Based Articles. *PLoS One*. 2021 Jun 25;16(6):e0253129. DOI: [10.1371/journal.pone.0253129](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0253129)
5. Saravudecha C, Na Thungfai D, Phasom C, Gunta-in S, Metha A, Punyaphet P, et al. Hybrid Gold Open Access Citation Advantage in Clinical Medicine: Analysis of Hybrid Journals in the Web of Science. *Publications*. 2023;11(2):21. DOI: [10.3390/publications11020021](https://doi.org/10.3390/publications11020021)
6. Tennant JP, Waldner F, Jacques DC, Masuzzo P, Collister LB, Hartgerink CH. The Academic, Economic and Societal Impacts of Open Access: An Evidence-Based Review. *F1000Res*. 2016;5:632. DOI: [10.12688/f1000research.8460.3](https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.8460.3)
7. Jain VK, Iyengar KP, Vaishya R. Article Processing Charge May Be a Barrier to Publishing. *J Clin Orthop Trauma*. 2020;14:14-16. DOI: [10.1016/j.jcot.2020.10.039](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcot.2020.10.039)
8. Vaishya R, Vaish A, Scarlat MM. Enhancing Biomedical Research Through Strategic Funding: A Comprehensive Review. *Natl Board Exam J Med Sci*. 2025;3(1):98-112. DOI: [10.61770/NBEJMS.2025.v03.i01.012](https://doi.org/10.61770/NBEJMS.2025.v03.i01.012)
9. Vaishya R, Sharma D, Sibal A, Puri B, Muralidharan M, Vaish A. Enhancing Global Biomedical Research: Educational Strategies for Bridging the Gap Between HICs and LMICs. *Natl Board Exam J Med Sci*. 2024;2(9):919-32. DOI: [10.61770/NBEJMS.2024.v02.i09.008](https://doi.org/10.61770/NBEJMS.2024.v02.i09.008)