

The fate of manuscripts rejected by the *Turkish Journal of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The aim of this study was to evaluate the fate of the articles after they were rejected from the *Turkish Journal of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation* (*Turk J Phys Med Rehab*).

Materials and methods: Between January 2016 and December 2021, rejected manuscripts by the *Turk J Phys Med Rehab* were retrospectively analyzed and whether these rejected articles were published in another journal was identified. For the manuscripts published elsewhere, article type, change in the article name, and the number and order of authors were noted. The index of the new journal, the impact factor for SCI-E journals and journal quartile were recorded. Whether the journal was a national journal/international journal, a specialty or non-specialty journal, and whether the impact factors were higher, lower, or the same as *Turk J Phys Med Rehab* were evaluated.

Results: Totally, 76% of 1,051 rejected articles were accepted for publication in another journal, after an average of 13.73 months. The name of the article, the order of the authors, and the number of the authors remained unchanged in 71.4%, 79.3%, and 80.8% of the articles, respectively. A total of 69.9% of the journals were non-specialty journals and 61.8% were general international medical journals. In addition, 32.6% of the journals were included in the SCI-E, and 70.9% of the articles in SCI-E were included in the Q4 and Q3 scope. The impact factor with 51.9% were lower or the same with the *Turk J Phys Med Rehab*.

Conclusion: Our study results showed that a high percentage of the articles rejected by the *Turk J Phys Med Rehab* found a place in another journal later, and that non-specialty journals that accept general articles were more prominent in the selection of journal. The fact that an article rejected from a journal can be corrected and amended in accordance with valuable reviewer comments by improving its academic quality and seeking success in other journals may be promising for researchers who submit their articles to journals.

Keywords: Fate, manuscript, rehabilitation, rejection, *Turk J Phys Med Rehab*, *Turkish Journal of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*.

The *Turkish Journal of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation* (*Turk J Phys Med Rehab*) is an English language international journal, accepting articles in the field of physical medicine and rehabilitation (PMR). It is an open-access, double-blind peer-reviewed journal published quarterly. It is indexed in the Science Citation Index-Expanded (SCI-E) (since 2009) and PubMed Central (since 2019), in addition to the other indexes. The Journal Impact Factor (JIF) in 2023 was 1.3 and five-year JIF is 1.4 according to the Clarivate Analytics Report and is in Q4 category.

Pre-evaluation process of each submission is carried out by the Editorial Board. Manuscripts are scanned for plagiarism or duplication. In case of an ethical issue on plagiarism or duplication, the Editorial Board acts in accordance with the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). The manuscripts which pass this stage are assigned to at least two double-blind peer-reviewers with a statistics reviewer. Reviewers are selected among independent experts who have published publications in the international literature on the submission subject and received considerable

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Received: July 11, 2024 **Accepted:** August 27, 2024 **Published online:** November 28, 2024

Cite this article as: Geler Külcü D, Sonel Tur B, Yanık B, Koldaş Doğan Ş, Bardak AN, Zateri C, et al. The fate of manuscripts rejected by the Turkish Journal of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. *Turk J Phys Med Rehab* 2024;70(4):427-432. doi: 10.5606/tftrd.2024.15462.



amount of citations. Research articles, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses are also reviewed by a biostatistician. By submitting a manuscript to the journal, authors accept that Editor may implement changes on their manuscripts including misleading statements and typos, as long as the main idea of the manuscript is not interfered. The Editorial Board will invite an external and independent Editor to manage the evaluation processes of manuscripts submitted by Editors or by the Editorial Board members of the journal. The Editor-in-Chief is the final authority in the decision-making process for all submissions.

In recent years, the number of article submissions has been increasing, and in parallel with this increase, the rejection rates are rising over the years. The scientific journals are receiving more submissions than they can publish; thus, rejection becomes mandatory. However, it is recommended to check the "fate of the rejected articles" periodically.^[1] These type of fate of rejected manuscript articles are important for guidance of the authors. More intriguingly, the journals need these types of articles for the Editorial Board to see their performance in the evaluation process, to provide insight, make a self-evaluation, and obtain feedback for future works. Therefore, it is highly recommended for the journals to track the rejected manuscripts periodically. Such an analysis has never been conducted for this journal until today, guiding us to undertake this study. Of note, the reasons for rejection from the journal was not mentioned in this article, as it was the subject of another article recently published.^[2]

In the present study, we aimed to evaluate the fate of the articles after they were rejected from the *Turk J Phys Med Rehab*. The primary objective was to ascertain whether the rejected articles were subsequently published in another journal, and if any formal amendments were made. The secondary objective was to analyze the characteristics of the journal in which they were eventually published which is thought to enable us to determine the circumstances and attributes under which the rejected article was accepted by another journal. We believe that these data may provide useful feedback to both the Editorial Board and the reviewers, and to the authors as well.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This retrospective, descriptive study was conducted at Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation between January 1st, 2016 and December 31st, 2021. Manuscripts sent to the

Turk J Phys Med Rehab during the study period were retrospectively scanned, and the rejected manuscripts were selected. It was checked whether these rejected articles were published in another journal. Articles published elsewhere were conducted to a detailed examination. Both the article characteristics and the journal characteristics in which it was published were investigated. The entire procedure was carried out by two Editors and five Associate Editors. Ethical approval for the study was waived, as the study did not involve human subjects.

The search was made from PubMed, Google Scholar, Turkish (TR) Index, and Scopus using the "article name" or "article name, first author's name and surname" or "first author's name and surname, keywords". If no match was found, the second author's name and surname or the last author's name and surname were scanned. If necessary, other authors' names were also included. Article name scanning was done in both English and Turkish languages.

If the rejected article was published in another journal, the inward information about both the article and the journal was defined. Evaluation criteria for the manuscript were as follows: (i) Article type: original article/case report/review/letter to the editor/meta-analysis and systemic review articles rates were specified; (ii) it was recorded whether there was a change in the name of the article, the number of authors (increase/decrease) and the order of authors in the article. Evaluation criteria for the journal were as follows: (i) The name of the new journal in which the rejected article was published and the index of the journal were noted; (ii) the impact factor for SCI-E journals were recorded, and assessed whether the impact factors were higher, lower, or the same as *Turk J Phys Med Rehab*; (iii) journal quartile from Web of Science (i.e., Q1 0-25, Q2 26-50, Q3 51-75, Q4 76-100) of the SCI-E journals was identified; (iv) it was recorded whether the journal was a national journal/international journal, as well as whether it was a specialty journal of PMR specialty or a general medical journal such as internal medicine, etc.

The duration was calculated for each published article defined as the time from being rejected from this journal to being accepted in the other journal in terms of months.

Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using the SPSS version 27.0 software (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA).

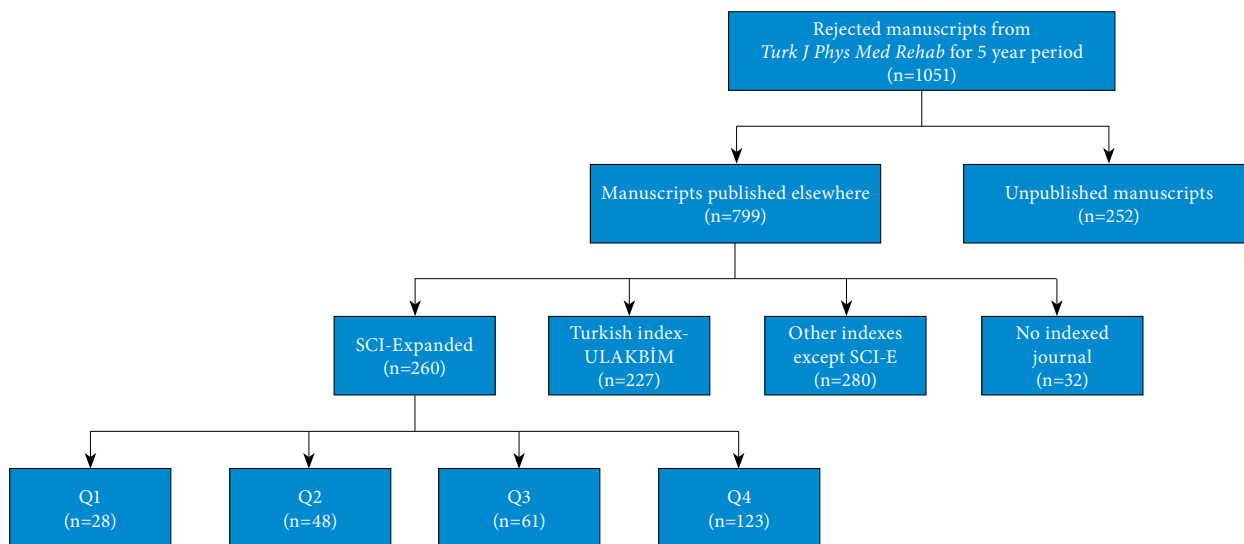


Figure 1. An overview of the study.
Q: Quartile.

Descriptive data were expressed in mean ± standard deviation (SD), median (min-max) or number and frequency, where applicable.

then, examined in detail and 70.9% of the articles were included in the Q4 and Q3 scope, as well as 10.7% were in the Q1 scope journals, including both specialty and

RESULTS

During the study period, a total of 1,051 articles which were rejected from the *Turk J Phys Med Rehab* due to unsuitable for publication were evaluated. A total of 799 of them (76%) were accepted as suitable for publication in another journal. The majority of the articles published in another journal were clinical studies with a rate of 81%, the others were case reports with 16%, and at lower rates, letters to the editor, review, meta-analysis and systemic review articles, respectively (Figure 1, Table 1).

Evaluation of manuscripts

The names remained unchanged in 71.4% of the articles. The order of authors and the number of authors also remained the same in 79.3% and in 80.8%, respectively. The number of authors increased in nearly 11.5% and decreased in 7.7% of the articles (Table 1).

Evaluation of the journals

Of all journals included in this study, 69.9% were non-specialty journals and 61.8% were general international medical journals. The overall characteristics of the journals were scanned according to their indexes: 32.6% of the journals were included in the SCI-E, indicating that 67.4% journals were outside the scope of SCI-E (Table 2). The SCI-E journals were,

	n	%
Published manuscript	799	76
Unpublished manuscript	252	24
Published manuscript		
Original article	647	81
Case report	128	16
Letter to the editor	12	1.4
Review	8	1
Meta-analysis	2	0.3
Systematic review	2	0.3
Unpublished manuscript		
Original article	170	68
Case report	66	26.4
Letter to the editor	6	2.4
Review	5	1.6
Meta-analysis	4	1.2
Systematic review	1	0.4
Change in manuscript name		
No change	570	71.4
Name has changed	229	28.6
Author order		
No change	633	79.3
Change	166	20.7
Number of author		
Same	645	80.8
Increased	92	11.5
Decreased	62	7.7

TABLE 2
Journal characteristics in which the rejected articles were published

	n	%
Journal national/international		
National	306	38.2
International	493	61.8
Journal branch/non- branch		
Branch	241	30.1
Non-branch	558	69.9
Journal index		
SCI, SCI-Expanded	260	32.6
Turkish index-ULAKBIM	227	28.4
Other Indexes except SCI-E	280	35.1
No indexed journals	32	3.9
Journal Q (for SCI-E journals)		
Q1	28	10.7
Q2	48	18.4
Q3	61	23.6
Q4	123	47.3
Impact factor comparing to the <i>Turk J Phys Med Rehab</i>		
Lower	96	36.9
Higher	125	48.1
Same	39	15

SCI-E: Science Citation Index Expanded; Q: Quartile; Turk J Phys Med Rehab: Turkish Journal of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.

non-specialty journals. The mean impact factor of the SCI-E journals in which the articles were published was found to be 1.71 ± 1.12 . The impact factor of 48.1% of these SCI-E journals was higher than the *Turk J Phys Med Rehab* and 51.9% were lower or the same. The articles were accepted in another journal after an average of 13.73 months, that is, approximately one year after being rejected from this journal (Figure 1).

DISCUSSION

In the present study, we evaluated the fate of the articles after they were rejected from the *Turk J Phys Med Rehab*. Our study results showed that three quarters of the articles, which were submitted to the journal and found to be inappropriate for publication, found a place in another journal. The journal characteristics were commonly non-specialty and general international medical journals.

In parallel with the increasing submission rates to the journals, rejection rates are increasing proportionally. Rejection of a manuscript does not always mean a lack of quality.^[1] Even good articles can be rejected. These type of fate of rejected manuscript articles are important for guidance of the authors

and also both the Editorial Board and the referees. In our study, the rate of the rejected articles published elsewhere was 76%. This rate is similar to the results of Okike et al. (76%),^[3] Karlıdağ et al.^[4] (75%), Holliday et al.^[5] (71.4%), Ray et al.^[6] (69%), and Grant and Cone^[7] (65.9%); however, a little higher than Zoccali et al.^[8] (60%), Earnshaw et al.^[9] (55.7%), Docherty et al.^[10] (54.6%), Menon et al.^[11] (46%) and Armstrong et al.^[11] (41%). The high rate may be feedback to the Editorial Board. Chew^[12] reported at least 82% in original articles and 70% in case reports eventually published somewhere and recommended authors to consider the comments from the journal as specific guides to improve their manuscript.

In the current study, the average time for the manuscript to be accepted in the other journal was 13 months. This nearly one-year interval is as the same as an anesthesia journal with 13 months^[10] and similar to an otolaryngology journal with 15 months,^[9] and also 15.8 months,^[7] but also longer than others with seven months.^[4] This can be attributed to checking the article according to the revisions and re-editing the article, as well as the evaluation process of the newly submitted journal.

According to the evaluation of the article types, the highest rate of both rejected and published articles in another journal were original articles, and this was thought to be compatible with the fact that original articles accounts for the highest frequency in general applications to the journal. The rate of original articles of *Turk J Phys Med Rehab* rejected and accepted by other journals was 81%, consistent with the fact that the original articles having the highest ratio 73.2%,^[11] 71%,^[7] 66.7%,^[10] but different from the highest ratio of case-reports (47.7%) as the article type.^[4]

In our study, there was a change in the article names in about a quarter of the published articles, which may be due to the criticisms in the first evaluation being taken into account. The change in the number of authors and author order was nearly 20% in our study, similar to a previous study.^[4] A 44% content change was also detected in their published studies. However, we were unable to analyze whether any change in the article content in this study, that can be considered a limitation.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that only about 30% of them were specialty journals published in the field of PMR, while the remaining majority were non-specialty journals. The remaining 70% were non-specialty journals, which accept articles on general topics; therefore, they were the target of the authors' of rejected manuscripts. Earnshaw

et al.^[9] reported a very similar ratio of specialty journal acceptance with 29%. In general, when the article is rejected from the *Turk J Phys Med Rehab* which is a specialty journal, authors tend to turn to non-specialty journals that more often accept articles on broader topics. It is reasonable that non-specialty, international medical journals sometimes become the address of the disappointed authors.

In the current study, one-third of the rejected manuscripts were published in SCI-E journals. The average impact factor of the other journals was close to ours. The impact factor of about half of the SCI-E journals was lower or the same, compared to the *Turk J Phys Med Rehab*. This can be explained by the difficulty of getting articles accepted in journals with higher impact factors. Less than half of the articles (48.1%) were published in high impact factor journals. The ratio was slightly higher compared to other articles with a ratio of 8% in the literature.^[9] This may be related to the impact factor of our journal. In the *Anaesthesia journal*, only two articles were accepted by higher impact factor journals,^[10] as the impact factor of the *Anaesthesia journal* was already high as 3.8; thus, the rejected articles commonly published eventually in lower impact factor journals. Similarly, in a Q1, high impact factor journal with 4.17, no rejected article was accepted by a higher impact factor journal, with the aforementioned reason.^[5]

According to our study results, a total of 70.9% the articles published in SCI-E journals were in Q4 and Q3 category. In addition, 10.7% of the articles were published in SCI-E journals within the scope of Q1, similar to a study reporting that 10% articles were published in more quality journals.^[4] This may be due to the increased academic value of the article by applying the criticisms made by the Editors and referees during the revision and rejection process in the *Turk J Phys Med Rehab*, thereby enabling it to be published in quality journals. However, this case may also be a reason for self-criticism for the Editors and referees, considering that the article evaluation process in the *Turk J Phys Med Rehab* is too detailed and complicated for the authors. About the Q interval ratios of SCI-E journals, in an extremely similar manner, Menon et al.^[1] reported 71.7% ratio of acceptance by Q3 ve Q4 journals after rejection of their journals; however, their Q1 journal rate was 3.8%, which was lower compared to the *Turk J Phys Med Rehab* with 10.7% ratio.

With recent shifts in academic trends, the growing volume of articles, and increasing journal costs, more journals are transitioning to paid models daily. Some

of these journals, indeed, shifts due to economic and policy changes, while others enter this path purely for commercial concerns or prestige. Distinguishing journals as paid or unpaid does not hold relevance for us. We also excluded predatory journals, as there is no definitive list for such journals, and with new additions each day, the list is continually evolving.

The main limitation to this study is that it did not include an examination of the content of articles published in other journals. Probably, if we had deeply looked in the content, we could have observed the changes made based on the suggested revisions and the acceptance status by another journal. This limitation can be overcome by publishing new “fate of rejected article” of this journal in the future, as all the journals are expected to publish these types of fate articles regularly.

In conclusion, our study results showed that a high percentage of the articles rejected by the *Turk J Phys Med Rehab* found a place in another journal later, and that non-specialty journals that accept general articles were more prominent in the selection of journal. The fact that an article rejected from a journal can be corrected and amended in accordance with valuable reviewer comments by improving its academic quality and seeking success in other journals may be promising for researchers who submit their articles to journals.

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

Author Contributions: Concept, review: B.S.T., D.E., B.Y.; Design, references, literature review, writing: B.Y.; Data collection and/or processing, analysis and/or interpretation: B.S.T., D.E., B.Y., D.G.K., Ş.K.D., A.N.B., C.Z.; Critical review: B.S.T., D.E., D.G.K., B.Y.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declared no conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding: The authors received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

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