



## Critical analysis of journal inclusion practice in the UGC-CARE list: A case study of Group-1 Kannada language journals

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Received: 01 April 2023; revised: 08 June 2023; accepted: 15 June 2023

The aim of this research is to investigate the journal inclusion practices of the UGC-CARE list, particularly Group-1 Journals in the Kannada Language. Group-2 journals are indexed in globally recognized databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, etc. Journals indexed in Group-1 category are mainly Indian journals published in various Indian languages. Group-1 has 10 Kannada language journals. The *Proceeding of Andhra Pradesh History Congress* resides outside the scope of the Kannada language that, necessitated its exclusion from the study. Since the data coding on the analysis protocol developed by the UGC is not publicly available, the researchers used the UGC-CARE list website to refine the data and add other quality indicators to align with the standard practice of journal analysis. The study found that only 3 out of 9 journals provide PDFs of back volumes. Similarly, only five out of nine journals show the table of contents (ToCs) of the latest issues on the UGC-CARE list website. Furthermore, none of the journals have eISSNs. This indicates that most of the journals are print-based publications. Two Kannada language journals, *Anikethana*, and *Hosa Manushya*, do not have ISSN. The study concluded that unless the UGC-CARE and publishers address the challenges identified and bring out relevant policies, Group-1 journals are of less value to the scholarly and public community.

**Keywords:** UGC-CARE list, Kannada Language, Journal Analysis

### Introduction

One of the reasons why researchers engage in intellectual enquiries is to find truth or solve complicated issues<sup>1</sup> confronting an individual, organization, or society. That is, research deals with finding and modifying information, which implies the need to lay a strong foundation for articulating and moderating conduct, behaviour and expectations required of researchers globally,<sup>2</sup> while investigating a given phenomenon. Research ethics are the codes of conduct, codes of ethics, etc., that portray what is legally or morally right, thereby allowing researchers to demonstrate what is appropriately acceptable or unacceptable behaviour in the conduct of research<sup>3</sup>.

There is the International Compilation of Human Research Standards<sup>4</sup> and in India, the University Grants Commission-Consortium for Academic & Research Ethics (UGC-CARE) is responsible for providing and enforcing such guidelines for the communities highlighted above<sup>5</sup>. The UGC-CARE list or UGC-CARE Reference list of Quality Journal is the white-list of journals developed by the UGC-

CARE, which is an empowered committee responsible for promoting quality research, academic integrity, and publication ethics in Indian universities.

Several studies have drawn the attention of scholars towards predatory or pseudo-journals which falsely claim to provide peer review. Hiding information about article processing charges (APCs), misrepresenting members of the journal editorial boards, and other violations of copyright or scholarly ethics have been reported<sup>6</sup>.

Moher *et al*<sup>7</sup> found that India is heavily involved in predatory journal publishing. In another study, Shen & Bjork<sup>8</sup> have found that 35% of the predatory publications come from India alone. In 2017, the UGC released the "UGC Approved list of Journals" to tackle this problem. This was the first major step towards stopping the growing numbers of predatory journals. However, the list was found to be flawed and included many predatory journals<sup>9</sup>. One of the major functions of the UGC-CARE committee was to find a solution to the predatory publishing practices prevalent in Indian academics and to improve the

quality of research in Indian higher education institutions.

The UGC, in a formal notification released on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2019, replaced the "UGC Approved list of Journals" with the "UGC-CARE Reference list of Quality Journals" or "UGC-CARE list". The UGC-CARE established the "Cell for Journal Analysis", Centre for Publication Ethics (CPE) at the Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU), Pune and entrusted all the responsibility to include and exclude journals periodically based on the recommendations received by the internal quality assurance cells (IQAC) across universities and colleges in India and assess through the journal inclusion criteria developed by the "Cell for Journal Analysis" at the Pune University.

The UGC-CARE list is considered as the significant initiative introduced by the UGC-CARE to tackle the predatory journals<sup>10</sup>. However, so far UGC-CARE list journals especially journals listed in Group-1 after they were qualified through UGC-CARE protocols developed for the inclusion of journals have not been critically examined in terms of their suitability as a scholarly publication and availability of key information on peer-review policy, article processing charges, ethical policies and digital archives of back volumes and so on.

This study examines whether the Kannada journals in the UGC-CARE Group-1 list provide sufficient information on crucial journal quality indicators such as editorial board members' information, peer-review process, digital archival information, etc. Additionally, the study aims to understand if the Kannada journals indexed in UGC-CARE list genuinely reflect the characteristics of scholarly publications.

### Review of literature

Since the emergence of the UGC-CARE list, there has been a lot of interest in the academia to know more about this journal white list. There are two kinds of studies that have been reported on the UGC-CARE list in the scholarly literature. One set of studies have explored the journals included in the UGC-CARE list and their characteristics, and a few other studies have tried to critically investigate this UGC-CARE list and have examined its pros and cons.

Das & Singh<sup>11</sup> have been examined the LIS journals included in the UGC-CARE list under group two. The study analyzed the characteristics of journals in terms of highly prolific authors, institutions, country and most cited papers along with keyword analysis to understand the trends in LIS domain.

Anbalagan & Balasubramani<sup>12</sup> analyzed all the LIS journals included in both group one and group two UGC-CARE list journals. The study examined 292 LIS journals indexed in Web of Science, Scopus and UGC-CARE journals. The study recommended that more LIS journals must be included in the UGC-CARE list and other databases to provide wider opportunity for Indian LIS professionals to publish and create visibility to their publications.

Chattopadhyay & Halder<sup>13</sup> have identified various parameters of LIS journals listed in the UGC-CARE list. The study examined the publication frequency, topics covered, journals indexing in major databases, and their ISSN and E-ISSN status. Anand & Gaurav<sup>14</sup> have made efforts to identify key emerging topics in LIS domain by examining the UGC-CARE list group one LIS journals. The study used text mining and topic modelling method to analyze the journal articles. The study found that most of the articles published in UGC CARE list group one are LIS journals authored from Indian LIS perspective.

Apart from these bibliometric studies on UGC-CARE list, there are few other studies which have looked at its pros and cons. The study by Jain & Maitra<sup>15</sup> discusses the need of UGC-CARE in weeding out predatory journals and promoting ethical practice in research publications. The study further applauds the effort initiated by the UGC-CARE to promote quality research, academic integrity and publication ethics in Indian universities.

Nagarkar *et al*<sup>16</sup> have tried to analyse the Indian journals indexed in UGC-CARE list. The 298 journals published in the field of arts, humanities and social sciences were considered for the study. The study found that majority of the Indian journals listed in UGC-CARE were published in Hindi with 67 journals followed by Urdu (31) and Marathi (26). It was found that multilingual Indian journals were predominately published in English and Hindi. The study provides greater visibility for Indian journals published in local languages and have not been indexed in major global databases.

Pandita, Koul & Singh<sup>17</sup> have critically examined that the UGC-CARE list practice of indexing and de-indexing journals is done periodically. The practice of inclusion and exclusion of journals periodically in the UGC-CARE list has put the university faculty in a disadvantageous position during their promotions, the study argues. The study further states that it was important to maintain the list of journals that have been delisted or removed from the UGC-CARE list

and the details of year of inclusion of a particular journal and removal made available subsequently. Vasantha Raju & Harinarayana<sup>18</sup> have also discussed about the archaic nature of the UGC-CARE list in the light of recent developments in the scholarly publication landscape, especially the emergence of preprints during the COVID-19. Here in this study, an attempt has been made to critically examine the journal inclusion practices of UGC-CARE list with special focus on Kannada language journals.

### Objectives of the study

- To evaluate the appropriateness of journal inclusion practice employed by the UGC-CARE list in indexing or listing group-1 journals, specifically focusing on Kannada language;
- To assess the availability of key information, including editorial board details, journal websites, article processing charges (APCs), ethical policies, and other relevant information in UGC-CARE list group-1 Kannada language journals; and
- To determine the scholarly nature and validity of the Kannada language publications included in the UGC-CARE list's group-1 category, thereby assessing their adherence to recognized standards of scholarly publications.

### Method

The study gathered data about Kannada language journals from UGC-CARE website (<https://ugccare.unipune.ac.in/>), which lists journals according to UGC-CARE protocols. Journals listed in Group-1 meet these protocols, while Group-2 consists of journals indexed in globally recognized databases such as Web of Science and Scopus. Group-1 primarily consists of Indian journals published in different Indian languages, including ten Kannada language journals listed on the website. The study excluded the '*Proceeding of Andhra Pradesh History Congress*' as it is not in Kannada. The remaining nine Kannada language journals listed in Group-1 were used as the study's final data source (refer Appendix-1 in the following link <https://shorturl.at/mopBJ>).

To analyze the Kannada language journals listed on the UGC-CARE website, analysis protocol developed by the UGC was used. This protocol has three parts: basic information (Protocol-1), primary criteria (Protocol-II), and secondary criteria (Protocol-III). However, the primary and secondary criteria were not publicly available, so the researchers used other quality indicators to refine the objective assessment

elements listed on the UGC-CARE website. These quality indicators included digital archival information, the peer review process, ethical policy, etc. Using this refined list of information, the researchers assessed the Kannada language journals on the UGC-CARE list based on their peer review status, editorial members' information, digital archival information, journal website availability, and APCs, among other factors.

Information about these journals was collected by visiting the link provided on the UGC-CARE website and the respective journal website or Table of Contents (ToCs) available on the UGC-CARE list website. The information was collected online from 12 to 14 April 2022. The journal data through UGC-CARE list website and ToCs was once again verified in March 2023 and it was found that *Aruhu-Kuru* Kannada journal was delisted from the UGC-CARE list. However there were no significant changes to the availability of key information of the journals used in the study.

### Results

In Table 1, the availability of basic information for Kannada language journals indexed in the UGC-CARE list is presented. Almost all the journals have made their basic information (UGC-CARE Protocol-1) available. However, only two journals have provided editorial information, including editor names, editorial boards, and their contact details on their websites. Two journals, namely *Anikethana* and *Hosa Manushya*, have not obtained the International Standard Serial Number (ISSN). None of the Kannada journals have an eISSN, indicating that they only publish print versions.

Out of the nine journals, only two have been registered with the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI). None of the Kannada language journals have obtained membership of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). While RNI registration is more focused on regulating newspapers and magazines, COPE is exclusively dedicated to monitoring the ethical standards of scholarly publications. Notably, the '*Journal of Veda Samskrita Academy*' has not provided any of its publications open including table of contents (ToCs) of any of its journal issues causing confusion, as to which primary language (whether in Kannada, English, Sanskrit or Hindi) are the articles published.

The findings related to key information availability of Kannada language journals indexed in UGC-CARE list are summarized in (Table 2). The results indicate

Table 1 — Availability of basic information of UGC CARE list Kannada Journals availability of key information

Sl. No	Basic Information	<i>Anikethana</i>	<i>Aruhu Kuruhu</i>	<i>Chinthana Bayalu</i>	<i>Hosa Manushya</i>	<i>Itihasa Darpana</i>	<i>Journal of Veda Samskrita Academy</i>	<i>Lokajnana</i>	<i>Shikshan Soudha</i>	<i>Shodha</i>
1.	Journal title	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
2.	Broad discipline and subject	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
3.	Name of publisher	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
4.	Country of origin and registered address	√	√	√	√	√	√			√
5.	Journal language/s	√	√	√	√	√	×	√	√	√
6.	Publishing frequency	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
7.	Editor name, editorial office address	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
	• phone	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
	• email	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
	• website	×	×	×	×	√	√	×	×	√
8.	Current status (date of last publication) (print/ online/ both)									
	• Print	√	√	√	√	√	×	×	√	√
	• Online	×	×	×	√	√	×	×	×	√
	• Both	×	×	×	√	√	×	×	×	√
9.	ISSN	×	√	√	×	√	√	√	√	√
10.	eISSN	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
11.	Other registrations/ memberships such as									
	• RNI	×	×	√	×	×	×	×	√	×
	• COPE	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
	• UGC-CARE	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×

Table 2 — Availability of Key information on UGC-CARE list Kannada Journal

Key Features	Information on availability of Back Volumes/Digital Archives (online/print)	Online Availability of Table of Contents (very latest issue)*	Online Availability of full text articles (very latest issues)	Having Website with complete details of the journal	Editorial Board with complete information (name, phone no, email)	Peer Review Information	Journals Current Status Continued/ Dis-continued/ No issues	Information on article processing charges (APC)	journal's ethical policies clearly stated
<i>Anikethana</i>	×	×	×	×	×	×	√	×	×
<i>Aruhu Kuruhu</i>	×	√	×	×	×	×	√	×	×
<i>Chinthana Bayalu</i>	×	√	×	×	×	×	√	×	×
<i>Hosa Manushya</i>	√	√	√	×	×	×	√	×	×
<i>Itihasa Darpana</i>	√	×	√	√	√	×	√	×	×
<i>Journal of Veda Samskrita Academy</i>	×	×	×	√	√	×	√	√	×
<i>Lokajnana</i>	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
<i>Shikshan Soudha</i>	×	√	×	×	√	×	√	×	×
<i>Shodha</i>	√	√	√	√	√	×	√	×	×

\*journals issue published during the year 2022 irrespective of its periodicity considered as very latest issue in the study, if 2022 issue is not available, it is considered as not available

that only three out of nine journals provide access to PDFs of back volumes, but there is no specific information available regarding the digital archives of back volumes. In the case of *Hosa Manushya*, PDFs of previous issues were accessible through third-party websites. Furthermore, five out of nine journals have made their Table of Contents (ToCs) for the latest issues available on the UGC-CARE list website.

*Hosa Manushya*, *Itihasa Darpana*, and *Sodha* provides free full text access to their recent issues. Five journals have included information about editorial members, including their affiliation and contact information. However, none of the journals have provided any information on the peer-review process that they follow for reviewing submitted manuscripts.

It was noted that *Lokajana*, indexed in the UGC-CARE list was last published in 2020. *Lokajana* was a triannual publication from Tumkur University that made its full-text publications available until 2014. After that there were no issues and it again reappeared in 2020. Apart from the *Journal of Veda Samskrita Academy*, no other journal has provided information on article processing charges (APC) or other fees associated with their publications. Table 2 shows that none of the Kannada language journals provide any information on ethical policies related to plagiarism or other unethical publication practices.

## Discussion

The UGC's decision to launch the UGC-CARE list is commendable as it was a much-needed measure to tackle the problem of predatory journals and publications in India. However, the inclusion of language-specific journals in the list has raised several questions about the inclusion protocols and the standards used to identify scholarly journals. Although majority of the Kannada language journals meet the basic requirements for inclusion in the UGC-CARE list, none of them have an eISSN, indicating that most of the journals are print-based. Additionally, two Kannada language journals - *Anikethana* and *Hosa Manushya* - do not have an ISSN, which is a matter of concern.

An in-depth study and examination of key information such as the availability of digital archives, full-text articles, peer-review information, and dedicated websites, related to UGC-CARE-listed Kannada language journals, shows that most of these journals needed more crucial information. In particular, almost all the journals indexed in the UGC-CARE list failed to

provide information regarding peer review practices, ethical publication policies, and article processing charges (APCs). Additionally, there were concerns about the consistency of certain journals' publications. Although five journals provided links to their latest issues on the UGC-CARE list website, inconsistencies in the publication history of *Lokajana*, a triannual publication of Tumkur University, were found during the examination.

Out of the nine Kannada language journals indexed in UGC-CARE list, only three have made their back volumes accessible in the form of PDF files on the web. However, there is lack of clear policy or information regarding the process of archiving and preserving their back volumes of journals for future reference. Upon reviewing the Table of Contents (ToCs) of certain journals, it became evident that some are publishing articles from different domains. For instance, *Ahruhu-Kuru* publishes articles from the library and information science domain.

Major scholarly societies, including the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), the Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association (OASPA), and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), which advocate for transparency and best practices in scholarly communications, have stressed the importance of providing essential information such as peer review processes, business practices relating to APCs, advertising, and publication ethics on journal websites<sup>19</sup>. However, the Kannada journals studied do not seem to follow many of the best practices enunciated by the association guidelines.

The UGC-CARE list seems to have bestowed unwarranted importance upon certain journals, especially regional language publications. As a result, some journals have resorted to unethical practices such as using excessive marketing strategies to solicit articles from potential authors.

The rationale behind UGC-CARE's inclusion of only nine Kannada language publications remains unclear. These nine titles or journals were purportedly recommended solely by University faculty or IQAC coordinators from various universities and colleges in Karnataka. However, given the vast number of universities and colleges in Karnataka - totalling 71 and comprising central, state, deemed and private institutions, it doubtful whether such a limited number of publications is truly representative of the local scholarly publication landscape.

To put this into perspective, the Office of Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) has indexed approximately 3575 newspapers and magazines published in Kannada. Even if one were to exclude 1000 newspapers, still there would be 2575 registered magazines and other forms of publication in RNI<sup>20</sup>. Consequently, it is imperative that transparency and openness be exercised in the process of selecting journals for inclusion in the UGC-CARE list. Failure to do so would create ambiguity and unjustifiably elevate a handful of journals, potentially leading to exploitation of authors.

Furthermore, this would pose a significant threat to the regional language publications landscape, which could gradually be wiped out as researchers and writers prefer to publish solely in UGC-CARE list journals. It is thus vital to consult subject experts and a diverse range of stakeholders, such as librarians, to ensure that the inclusion of only nine publications in Kannada languages does not overlook a wealth of valuable content.

Upon closer examination, it is apparent that some of the Kannada journals listed in UGC-CARE may not qualify as scholarly publications. Journals such as *Anikethana*, *Aruhu Kuruhu*, *Hosa Manyshya*, *Chinthan Bayalu*, and *Shikshan Soudha* have contents that are more aligned with popular literary magazines rather than scholarly publications although *Anikethana* and *Hosa Manyshya* have made valuable contributions to Kannada cultural and literary discourse.

The UGC-CARE Committee needs to provide a clear definition of what constitutes scientific or scholarly publication. This issue has already been tackled by similar journal whitelists such as the Norwegian Register for Scientific Journals, Series, and Publishers, which has successfully distinguished between scientific publications and professional and cultural journals<sup>21</sup>. The Journal Publishing Practices and Standards (JPPS) Framework developed by INASP and AJOL for assessing scholarly journals published from the Global South is also a notable example of how scientific journals can be evaluated and included in a whitelist<sup>22</sup>. The Latin American publicly-funded scholarly publication landscape provides a valuable lesson for countries such as India and other developing nations<sup>23</sup>.

## Conclusion

The UGC-CARE is an outcome of commendable efforts in classifying journals into different groups, including some Indian-based journals and others

indexed globally in recognized databases. However, there are several areas that require careful scrutiny in order to improve the standards of the home-grown journals. Firstly, most journals are still in print format which remains less visible to scholars despite their extensive efforts to publish research in UGC-CARE list. These journals must try to publish articles abstract in English and make them available online. Secondly, many of the journals analyzed in the current study lack key information which limits their reputation and prevents them from being considered among the highly representative Group-1 journals. For example, the lack of a peer review information, APCs, ethical policy and archival information can negatively impact the journals. Unless UGC-CARE and publishers address these identified challenges and develop relevant policies to help home-based journals reach a global level, Group-1 journals may become a collection of documents that hold less value to the scholarly and public community.

The study has only assessed Kannada language journals. Future studies should consider larger samples, including journals in other languages, to assess the availability of key information required to determine the quality of journals included in UGC-CARE list Group 1. Additionally, it may be worth comparing the inclusion criteria of UGC-CARE list journals with other well-established standards or criteria to further strengthen it.

## Acknowledgement

We thank Mr Amrollah Shamsi (Independent Researcher, Bushehr, Iran) for his valuable suggestions and always supporting our academic endeavours.

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