



Addressing Linguistic Disadvantage in Writing Articles for International English Medium Journals

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Abstract

The study at hand aims to investigate Algerian researchers' perceptions of the importance of writing research articles for publication in international English medium journals, along with the incentives and disincentive influencing this process, and the challenges they encounter. To reach these aims, a survey is conducted with twenty-six Algerian researchers from three different fields of study using an online questionnaire created in Google Forms. The vast majority of the participants rate writing research in English as of great importance and they opt for different incentives influencing their decision to publish in international English medium journals, but they perceive themselves to be disadvantaged by their non-native status as the degree of their perceived difficulty of writing scientific articles in English is very high. This study highlights the correlation between the mastery of English as a principal prerequisite in the respondents' fields of study and the use of English as an indispensable key to communicate their research results to the global scientific community. It then ends up with some strategies to be taken by higher education institutes to address this issue from different standpoints.

Introduction

Today, English language not only connects academic researchers around the world but also seems to be the right option to spread scientific knowledge to a large audience. This claim is reinforced by many studies (Bordons & Gómez 2004, Tardy 2004, Chandra Sekhar, 2018, Soler, 2019), English is a pre-requisite to being a competent scientific researcher whose papers are internationally recognized and rewarded. It may be assumed that the scientific achievement does not depend on the language of which it is written, but a headline such as 'publish (in English) or perish' (Di Bitetti & Ferreras, 2017) shows clearly that the world of scientific publication is dominated by the English language (Ammon, 2001), English has become an imperative for readership of scientific research articles.

For many international scientific journals, English language is the medium of writing, assuming that this can make scientific articles more visible and cited (Sibah, 2015). We believe that the qualities required to be a good scientific researcher can be broken down into more specific core competencies, but the global medium through which scientists communicate their relevant findings to the global target scientific community matters. Who knows, perhaps it will be the turn of another language to play this role in the coming years. That will not matter, what matters perhaps is that science needs an international common language to communicate important results globally and now it is the turn of English to play this role. This is justified by the fact that more than 90 % of the indexed scientific articles in the natural sciences have been published in the English language (Hamel, 2013; Ammon, 2012 cited in Bitetti and Ferreras, 2017).

Undeniably, publishing scientific papers exclusively in English may limit the ability of brilliant researchers who have contributed greatly to their local communities and have not written articles in English. Non-native scientists, especially in the Outer Circle (Kachru, 1985), are often at a disadvantage, many of their good research papers remain unnoticed due to the English language writing problems (Chieh Chien, 2019). It can be suggested that there is still space for translation, but translation help in scientific fields of research might be limited. Hence, the study reported here addresses this situation by exploring Algerian researchers' perceptions of the importance of writing research in English language in their fields of study, the factors affecting their decision to publication in international English medium journals, the difficulties they face and the practical recommendations they provide to improve writing top quality articles and boost international research contributions.

The Global Language of Academic Publications: The Turn of English

“English is everywhere...it is the language of globalisation—of international business, politics and diplomacy. It is the language of computers and the Internet...”(Johnson 2009:01), it is the global language of today's academic publications, one can add.

It is already mentioned by Bordons and Gómez (2004) that having the possibility of knowledge exchange among international scientists is essential; yet, the absence of a common medium can prevent important interactions from taking place. Put clearly, such international process of communication may not be facilitated by diverse languages, and this is not a question of restricting multilingualism. English gained acceptance gradually as the lingua franca in science during the last century. Its increasing role can be observed through the analysis of the language used in scientific journals (Duszak and Lewkowicz, 2008; Giannoni, 2008).

Most journals, mainly open access and open archives, offer more than publishing platforms, they; either in printed or electronic version, enable communication between scholars; they are one of the main channels used by scientists to convey their findings to the public (Bordons and Gómez, 2004). Researcher's performance and productivity are judged largely on the number of publications as well as the journal reputation. Consequently, getting published in indexed journals that of higher scientific quality and of higher impact factors increases the visibility and citation of the researchers' works. With regard to the global language of scientific publication, most national and international valuable journals are choosing English as a medium of writing to adjust themselves to the international character of science. The Algerian Scientific Journal Platform (ASJP) for example, an electronic publishing platform for Algerian scientific journals developed and managed by The Research Centre on Scientific and Technical Information CERIST, makes very clear that the abstracts of research articles submitted on this platform must be written in more than the national language and sometimes mandatory to be translated into the English language (www.asjp.cerist.dz).

The existing literature tends to focus on the reasons why researchers decide to publish their results in English rather than in their first language. In this context, Tardy (2004) points at two primary roles of English in science, one is that of a common language, a lingua franca, which allows for ease of information storage and retrieval that may be more efficient than translation and, provides a means for knowledge advancement. What is found by Irene López-Navarro et al. (2015) has a strong relation with this role, articles written in English language are likely to be recognized and rewarded. But at the same time, English may be seen more nefariously, acting as something of a Tyrannosaurus rex, in the words of Swales: “ a powerful carnivore gobbling up the other denizens of the academic linguistic grazing grounds” (1997: 374). This has to do with the unequal access given to researchers; while non inner circle scientists are still often at a disadvantage (spending lots of time and money to learn English or translate their

works in this language); inner Circle researchers enjoy a disproportionately large percentage of publications and are more likely to be the “gatekeepers” of published works (Gibbs, 1995; Canagarajah, 2002 cited in Tardy, 2004).

Far from this controversy surrounding the roles of English, a title such as ‘The Global Language of Academic Publications: The Turn of English’ opens the doors for the diversity of languages. Whether or not that common language is English, what is crucial then is the advancement of science which is based on the communication between researchers from different countries all over the world.

International Peer Reviewed Journals : A Filter for Poor Quality Papers

Generally speaking, peer review can be defined as a voluntary process that determines whether a scientific manuscript is worthy of publication or not (Alexandrov et al., 2009). As it can be evident from this view, submitted manuscripts go through a critical process by which their validity, quality and often originality are assessed before publication. Many journals, including the international indexed ones, rely on double blind peer review, where the identity of both the author and reviewer is kept hidden; to maintain the integrity of academic research. Peer review, therefore, is still believed to be the only widely accepted available method for research validation and publication process efficiency. It functions as an effective filter for insufficient or poor quality articles. Its ultimate purpose is to improve the quality of published research and increase networking possibilities among three main participants: authors, editors, and reviewers. Besides, it helps open important channels of communication among them in a joint contribution to the field (McNair et al., 2019).

Following the author’s submission of the manuscript usually made using an interactive Internet-based system or at least as email attachments, and after making an initial assessment about its appropriateness to a given journal, reviewers with specialized knowledge of various research approaches and without conflicts of interest are invited by editor(s) to start the review process. Reviewers play a pivotal role in the process of reviewing (Lovejoy et al., 2011). They are expected to do so many things as part of what is thought to be a ‘culture of service’ to their profession. They responsibly evaluate, verify and provide feedback with a constructive tone in a timely, respectful, and unbiased manner. Reviewers often independently read the manuscript to gain an understanding of the content then examine these key elements: (a) the originality of the problem, (b) the clarity of the abstract (the presence of the key items and the alignment with the content of the manuscript), (c) the consistence of the necessary moves in the introductory section with the research problem and adequate academic language style, (d) the methodological validity, (e) relevance and significance of findings, (f) interest to readership, (g) the relevance and significance of the findings, (h) and future directions (Alexandrov 2009).

To the authors of the submitted manuscript, the selected reviewers are asked to provide recommendations for acceptance, rejection or most frequently specific recommendations for (minor or major) revisions to be made before the manuscript gets published (Brown et al., 2017). In doing so, reviewers provide an unbiased opinion and offer constructive comments to improve the submitted manuscript or, in the case of rejection, motivate authors submit a high quality and impactful work in the future. That is to say, reviewers are not the decision makers to accept or reject the submission; they just make judgments and recommendations to help the editor reach a decision about the suitability of the manuscript for publication. Journal editors’ job then is to select the top-quality articles so that their journals may have higher impact factors (Balster, 2017).

This brings us to the question why one should (may be a lecturer) be a reviewer? ‘Reviewing journal manuscripts is both time-consuming and intellectually stimulating’ (Lovejoy: 1, 2011).

As they spend time assessing the work of authors, reviewers may enhance their own scholarly writing skills. Suffice to say, the work done by the reviewers is greatly appreciated and necessary for the integrity of science.

Methods

The study at hand opts for a survey using a questionnaire that is created online via Google Forms. Online survey approach provides convenience in several ways, according to Osuala (2004); survey research design is most appropriate for studies which center on individuals' opinions, beliefs, motivations and behaviours. Sampling in this study is a purposive one; following the typical strategy where participants share the same experience (Dornyei 2007: 128). Mixed method approach is used in the analysis of the questionnaire (quantitatively with closed questions and qualitatively with the open ended questions). The questionnaire is developed on the basis of the abovementioned research questions. It consists of eight questions, six planned (structured) closed-ended and two open-ended questions. The questionnaire is sent to 40 full time teachers at various Algerian faculties of sciences to yield a broad view of the current issue but only 26 are returned. See Table 1 for distribution of the respondents who returned the questionnaire:

Table 1. The Distribution of the informants by field of study

Faculty	Number of respondents	Percentage
Natural science	17	65.38%
Physics	5	19.23%
Economics	4	15.38%

Results and Discussion

The present study opts for a survey, using an online questionnaire, with 26 selected Algerian researchers from three different faculties as explained in the methodology section. Collected data is presented quantitatively using descriptive statistics through tables, and qualitatively for the open questions.

Q1. How do Algerian researchers rate the importance of writing research in English?

Table 2. The Importance of writing research in English, by field of study

	Natural science	Physics	Economics
Not important	5.8%	0%	0%
Somewhat important	5.8%	20%	25%
Very important	88.2%	80%	75%

The data displayed in Table 2 indicate that the perceived importance of writing research articles in English language does not vary between the participants' fields of study. The majority of the participants in Natural science field (88.2%) rated writing research in English as very important. Similarly, in the fields of Physics (80%) and Economics (75%), nearly all of them reported a higher importance of English language for writing research.

Q2. What are the most effective motivating factors for publishing in international English medium journals?

Table 3. The encouraging factors for publishing in international English medium journals

Incentives		Do not affect	Affect enough	Affect the most
Personal Factors	1. Citation and Visibility	15.38%	19.23%	65.3%
	2. Self-satisfaction /pride	15.38%	23.07%	61.53%
	3. Self-improvement	19.23%	23.07%	57.69%
	4. Publishing experience	23.07%	26.92%	50%
	5. Deep interest in the field	23.07%	38.46%	38.46%
Professional Factors	6. Career promotion and financial reward	0%	3.84%	96.15%
	7. Recognition	15.38%	15.38%	69.23%
	8. University credibility and reputation ranking	30.76%	30.76%	38.46%
Factors associated with international indexed journals	9. Fastest response/review speed	7.69%	7.69%	92.30%
	10. Rapid publication	11.53%	19.23%	69.23%
	11. Rigorous review	15.38%	38.46%	46.15%
	12. Transparency	26.92%	38.46%	34.61%

Having a look at Table 3, one may deduce that the participants selected more than one motivating factor for publishing in international English medium journals. More precisely, for the personal factors, the highest percentage among them (65.3%) noted that ‘citation and visibility’ is the most important incentive leading to publishing research papers in international journals. While 61.53% opted for ‘self satisfaction /pride’, 57.69% ticked self-improvement, 50% selected the factor ‘publishing experience’, the least percentage (38.46 %) chose ‘deep interest in the field’.

Although the participants are from different fields, for the professional factors, ‘career promotion and financial reward’ is the most cited factor by nearly all the respondents (96.15%), followed by recognition (69.23%) then ‘university credibility /reputation ranking’ (38.46%).

As for the characteristics of international English medium journals that best invite submissions, the data gathered in order of frequency are as follows: fastest response/review speed (92.3%), rapid publication (69.23%), rigorous review (46.15%) and transparency (34.61%) are the most effective factors that motivate the respondents to publish their works in international journals.

Q3. To what extent is poor academic writing in English a hindering factor for publishing in international English medium journals?

Table 4. Poor academic writing in English as a hindering factor for publishing internationally

Does not hinder	11.53%
Hinders a little bit	19.23%
Hinders very much	69.23%

As Table 4 shows, more than half of the respondents (69.23%) opined that poor academic writing in English language hinders them very much from publishing their articles in international journals and, by implication, their findings are not communicated to a large audience.

Q4. How do Algerian researchers perceive writing a scientific article in English for international publication?

Table 5. Perceptions of writing a scientific article in English language for international publication

Easy	7.69%
Hard a little bit	23.07%
Difficult	69.23%

As it can be seen in Table 5, the degree of the perceived difficulty of writing scientific articles in English is very similar to the previous question (the assumption that poor academic writing in English is a hindering factor for publishing in international journals). The findings denote that 69.23% of the total sample finds difficulty in writing research in English. This may be due to many reasons that are worthy of investigation.

Q 5. If is not easy; how do you cope with the challenge of writing scientific articles in English?

With regard to their level of proficiency in English, unsurprisingly, the vast majority of the participants reported that they use some translations websites such as Google translation and Context reverso. The respondents also noted that the help from these sites is limited, they are aware that they do not always provide effective translation. Other informants report that they have their articles translated to English by professional translators (proofreading sites) but unfortunately with high fees, and sometimes the content is not well translated and therefore the paper is rejected.

Q 6. Do Algerian researchers feel linguistically disadvantaged in the field of academic publishing compared to other writers for whom English is an L1?

Table 6. Feeling at disadvantage in the publication field

Yes	89%
No	11%

Table 6 indicates that while only (11%) of the respondents reported that they do not feel at disadvantage in the publication field compared to other writers for whom English is an L1, (89%) of the total sample agreed with this statement.

Q 7. Can the use of English as a medium of instruction in Algerian universities be effective for successful publication in international English medium journals?

Table 7. The effectiveness of using English as a medium of instruction in successful international publication

Highly effective	79%
Moderately effective	17%
Slightly effective	2%
Ineffective	2%

When asked about whether or not they believe that publishing internationally has a correlation with the need for the use of English as a medium of instruction in Algerian universities, the vast majority of the participants (79%) reported their approval by ticking the “highly effective” option, while (17%), (2%), (2%) respectively ticked “moderately, slightly and ineffective”. One possible interpretation would be that the source of the respondents’ consensus about the expediency of this suggestion is rooted in their certainty that English is the international language of science and academic publication in particular. That may be why they dare generalize it to be a potential effective solution.

Q 8. What efforts should be made to enhance researchers' contribution in the international scientific publication?

This question is intentionally designed to be an open-ended question to gain access into as much strategies as possible to produce high quality research papers in English and increase international research contributions.

Among the 26 respondents, four of them state that they do not know, and 16 of them provided some comments which are grouped according to their sameness as follows; (1) Nine (9) respondents stressed the idea of formal training about writing research in English and the need of motivation by their faculties; (2) Five (5) respondents pointed out the significance of extensive reading of papers in English; (3) Two (2) respondents appreciated the idea of proofreading by native speakers or teachers of English language

The results obtained in the present study echo at some extent the views presented in the introductory section. First, writing research in English language is perceived as very essential, the vast majority of the respondents opine that English language is an indispensable tool in their fields of study, and by implication, it is the right option to publish scientific papers in international journals. This finding is supported by their view that English language is the gate keeper of science. Academic research and English language as a medium are not treated separately; and thus, the use of the respondents' native language to communicate research findings internationally may have not become a free choice. Consistent with this, Tardy (2004) posits that work not published in English tends to be undervalued or even ignored. For the smaller number of the respondents who opt for the negative answer 'Not important', they may have what to say about English as a medium of writing for international publication and therefore their perspectives merit further investigation. The findings also denote that there are several effective incentives and disincentives influencing Algerian researchers' decision to publish research articles in international English medium journals. The most important personal incentive is the tendency to be more cited and visible. This is in line with the findings of Bitetti and Ferreras (2017), research articles written in English have a higher chance of being cited than those published in other

languages. As might be expected, the most cited professional factor by all the respondents is the 'career promotion and financial reward' followed by 'recognition' then 'university credibility /reputation ranking'. These perspectives may indicate that the need of publication in international journals is strongly felt in the respondents' context (prerequisite for habilitation and professorship processes). Since university rankings is the least cited indicator, it is high time for the Algerian higher education institutes have a serious self criticism and motivate academics to increase the quality of their research papers as long as their reputations and prestige are intertwined with the number of the research articles published in some indexed journals and their following citations by researchers (Lee & Lee 2013, Meng Ge 2015, Shih-Chieh Chien 2019). Other motivating factors focus on the international journals characteristics that best invite submissions. It appears that the respondents pay careful attention to the reputation of the journals to which they submit their articles. They appreciate the journal that delivers fastest review, and publishes accepted papers within a reasonable timeframe. Similar to previous findings (Warlick & Vaughan, 2007), the amount of time between acceptance of an article and its publication is often listed as an important criterion in the consideration process especially when researchers face time constraints. Though it can be said that fast publication often indicates weak peer review, the results of this study highlight the respondents' interest in the quality of the reviews and transparency.

It is also worth mentioning that even so, the lack of academic writing skills in English language hinders very much the selected sample from publishing their findings in international English medium journals. To further detect this issue, the results obtained confirm that more than half of the respondents have writing difficulties in English language. Instead of working on the ideas in the manuscript, Algerian researchers spend a tremendous amount of time revising the language. In doing so, they either translate their article using different sites though they are not usually effective, or they have their articles translated to English by professional translators (proofreading sites) with high fees. However, according to them, the rate of successful international publication remains quite low due to poor translation. In line with the findings of Duszak and Lewkowicz (2008), publishing in English inevitably brings with it linguistic challenges. Due to limited English proficiency or poor translation, high quality research may lose its value. In other words, since it may become hard to review a scientific content of a paper with poor English, as the ideas are often not clearly communicated and the incorrect grammar is very distracting, papers are rejected and non native English scholars are diverted away from international publishing. On this basis, future research can focus more on Algerian researchers' writing difficulties for scholarly publication in English.

The previous question goes further and more specific to shed light on the respondents' feeling of disadvantage in the academic publication as compared to writers for whom English is an L1. It is shown that most of the respondents believe it to be the case for them. They perceive themselves to be disadvantaged by their non-native status and which is quite similar to some other research carried out in different contexts (Kuteeva & Mauranen, 2014). In the same line of thought, Sibah (2015) proposes that the dominance of English is double edged as it carries both negative and positive consequences.

The two last questions in the questionnaire aim to provide practical recommendations by referring to what the respondents report as appropriate techniques for writing quality papers in English and motivating international research contributions. Their suggestions include three elements: formal academic training about writing research in English and the need of motivation by their faculties, extensive reading of scientific papers and having papers proofread by native speakers or professional teachers of English. In the same vein, it is noteworthy that more than the half of the respondents regards the use of English as a medium of instruction in Algerian universities as a highly contributive factor for the successful publication in international English medium journals. This may be because they consider writing English papers as an essential part of their research process. This hypothetical motion is at the heart of the research at hand; thus, it comes to receive the lion's share in the implications for further studies.

Conclusion

Due to many reasons, researchers of Natural science, Physics and Economics in Algeria are aware of the ideology of publish in English or perish, they appear to be under increasing pressure to have their work published in international English medium journals. Higher education institutes need to be aware of this situation and improve the teaching of English, especially in the common fields of science. Perhaps, they need to understand that global English means the end of English as, if not a foreign, a second foreign language in Algerian universities.

This study is conducted only to meet with the non-inner circle researchers' needs and expectations of successful publication in English medium journals. The findings discussed are believed to be beneficial inputs for Algerian researchers. However, further research is required to be undertaken in-depth alongside with detailed studies to fill the gaps that this study points

out. To this end, some questions are addressed to be investigated through various case studies; (1) What plans, if any, are there to encourage international publication in English medium (indexed) journals?; (2) Are there possibilities to introduce English as a medium of instruction in the Algerian universities? If so, what are the costs, in terms of time, money and efforts?; (3) What role should higher education institutes play to boost international research contributions and increase the publication and citation scores of their faculty members?; (4) From which standpoint(s) the problems of publishing in the English Language have to be considered?

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