



**Demystifying Problems and Opportunities of the Persianophone Physical Education Ph.D. Academic Writers in Writing English Research Article Abstracts for International Journal Publication**

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**Abstract**

Writing effective and persuasive manuscripts for submission to the high-indexed Iranian and international English-medium journals for the purpose of publication deserves having to-the-point knowledge and proficiency, which the Non-Native English writers of the non-English speaking countries seem to be lacking. Therefore, researchers need to identify problems and challenges that the group of writers encounter in the field of English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP). Therefore, this study aims to identify the ERPP needs of the Physical Education Ph.D. students and writers. Hence, interviews were conducted with a group of Physical Education content experts and Ph.D. students to identify the writers' problems and challenges. The interviews were tape recorded as the participants had already been informed of the recordings and research aim. The tape recordings were then transcribed and analyzed in the thematic analysis and the grounded theory methods. The data analysis came up with four major themes (gained in the selective coding stage), 20 sub-themes (gained in the axial coding stage) and 83 themes (gained in the initial/open coding stage). The four major themes were 'problem with language,' 'problem with content,' 'problem with journals,' and 'the demotivating factors.' The fourth major theme, i.e., 'the demotivating factors', consisted of the sub-heading the technological illiteracy problem, which should be regarded as the novelty feature of this paper. The research is useful for material designers and instructors of the English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) and others to offer tailor-made education to the tertiary level Physical Education students.

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## 1. Introduction

The nightmare of possible rejection of their manuscript in the Anglophone-dominated journals is really annoying the Ph.D. student writers, who are considered the “bêtes noires” of the English-medium journals’ reviewers and editors. The Persianophone writers, including the Physical Education Ph.D.ers, are no exception as they are quite aware of the importance of the stressful and frustrating job of publishing in English, which is their additional language; however, they dare running the risk. They wait days and nights for fruition of the hope, which usually ends in disappointment and mishap. Email messages of publication rejection, sent by the journal editors, is a hard-to-digest bitter event, triggering shedding of tears on their face. Klimas (2015) writes:

*“After careful deliberation, we regret to inform you that, unfortunately, we will not be able to publish your paper on this occasion. You are of course now free to submit the paper elsewhere should you choose to do so. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to consider your work. We hope the outcome of this specific submission will not discourage you from the submission of future manuscripts,” (Klimas, 2015).*

It is interesting to say that despite the fiasco and misery, more and more academic writers annually brave the challenges, and difficulties, and turn to international publication. Among the points which encourage the publication by the authors are the journals’ high impact factor and visibility; extensive scope of citations due to their publication in the English language, which draws thick slice of readership; academic grants; money; promotion and the compulsion of publication as a requisite for Ph.D. graduation. The necessity and precondition for publication in the English-language journals has now extended to all academic disciplines, including Physical Education. Based on a study, on average, the number of publications in international journals grew by 14.6% a year from 1993 to 2010 (Zhang, Patton & Kenney, 2013).

Despite such a growth in the “publish or perish” publication by the non-native English writers, the number of perished manuscripts is getting more and more high. Khadilkar (2018) holds that in 60 percent of cases, the papers’ destiny is rejection. Related studies acknowledge that only 44% of 19,123 abstracts accepted for presentation in 234 academic meetings in the 1957-1999 period were published and the rest were rejected (Von Elm, Costanza, Walder, & Tramer, 2003). But what really causes the hell?

The problems need in-depth postmortem scrutiny and autopsy to save the Non-Native English manuscript writers of the unwanted fate. Scholars have over the past decade tried to look into the depth and core of the problems, mentioning publication language, publication types, language use and poor content of the submitted documents as the core problems. Yet certain others focus on injustices and bias in manuscript evaluation by journal editors and peers. Certain other scholars consider the reviewers as the masked and invisible agents, whose comments set as “occluded genre” (Swales, 1996). Weber and Mungra (2010) recently threw light on the most immediate reviewer comments, putting them within a framework. In Iran context, Tahririan and Sadr (2013), Zare, Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, Ketabi and Keivanloo-Shahrestanaki (2016) conducted similar studies, all considering problems of Iranian manuscript writers in general. To the best knowledge of the researcher, there has been no such study

looking exclusively to publication problems and challenges of the Physical Education Ph.D. writers of English manuscripts. Therefore, realizing the existing gap in the literature, the researcher conducted this study to answer the question: “What are the perceptions of the Physical Education content experts and Ph.D. student writers on the problems and challenges of paper submission to the English-language medium journals for publication?”

## 2. Literature Review

Writing for publication, irrespective of its advantages, is highly challenging for different disciplines' academic writers, who use English as an Additional Language (EAL). On 62 percent of cases (Khadilkar, 2018), the submitted manuscripts are rejected, leaving their writers in an embarrassed position. The issue has drawn a wealth of research, each focusing on one aspect of the challenge.

Some scholars have thrown light on the peer reviewers' criticisms that lead to total rejection or calls for minor/major revision, finally leading to acceptance. Wiley (2020), Agampodi (2013), and Wincka, Fonseca, Azevedo, and Wedzichac (2011) claim poor writing style and poor English have a strong influence on the overall impression of the manuscript, setting as the most important causes of rejection. Wincka et al. (2011) hold that the poor writing also manifests itself in the difficulty to follow the logical flow of the manuscript. Mukherje (2018) believes that therefore, it is important to deal with such a problem. Wincka et al. (2011) admit that failure to meet the journal standards is so influential that demotivate the writer demotivation and give up upon receiving the message of immediate and first rejection. Subsequently, some of the writers go ahead and defy the rejection decision and opt for another journal to try their luck (Wincka et al., 2011).

Bordage (2001) cites a number of reasons for the rejection, the most important of which being “Text difficult to follow and to understand,” “Title,” “Abstract,” “Writing and presentation,” “Insufficient or incomplete problem statement,” “Unimportant or irrelevant topic,” The scholar also referred to top nine reasons (positive comments) written by the reviewers recommending acceptance of medical education manuscripts. The most noticed reason and advantageous point seen in the list is as follows: “Well-written manuscript (clear, straightforward, easy to follow, logical).”

Shohamy (2008) and Uzuner (2008) spoke against the “Anglophone-centered evaluation system.” While criticizing “an additional mechanism that creates and perpetuates the de facto language policy and practices of publishing in English,” (p. 156) Shohamy (2008) maintained that it constituted the “centripetal pull” that “drew non-Anglophone peripheral scholars towards the dominant practices and ideologies in the Anglophone center,” (p. 160).

While Belcher (2007) and Uzuner (2008) encountered discursive and non-discursive difficulties in academic publishing, Schuler (2013) considered the root cause of the challenge that puts the academic writers in a wrestling position is Englishization (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas 1999; Schuler, 2013; Muresan & Pérez-Llantada, 2014). In a qualitative study, Schuler (2013) investigated language use in publication practices of a group of academic writers in a German university. The students were graduate students of linguistics which is a rich plurilingual discipline that deals with diversified languages, well lending itself to studies on the publication behaviors. Using interviews to elicit data on the publication behavior of the

English using academic writers Schuler (2013) came to the conclusion that the English language, used by the researchers and academic writers who use it for the purpose of publication, puts other groups of researchers who use languages other than English for the purpose of publication in a conflicting position. The study proposed easing the publication process for those in academia who use languages other than English as the second language, thus paving the ground for multilingual practices for publication at least in the disciplines that are sensitive to languages.

Flowerdew and Li (2009), Kuteeva and Airey (2014), and McGrath (2014) showed that academic writers' practices are mediated by micro-level contextual factors, while referring to disciplinary variation and target audience as the challenges facing the early carrier and novice researchers.

Lillis and Curry (2011) said that among challenges and problems facing the writers is the "powerful evaluation systems" at work at the "Anglophone center" that directly and indirectly support English as the medium for publication of the academic texts. "Powerful evaluation systems of academic knowledge production based in the Anglophone center are both directly and indirectly supporting the privileging of English as the medium of academic texts for publication" (p. 156), constituting the "centripetal pull" that draws non-Anglophone peripheral scholars towards the dominant practices and ideologies in the Anglophone center (p. 160).

Zheng and Guo (2018) also focused on the non-English research manuscript writers' multilingual language practices in publishing. They believed that publication in and about English resulted in structural inequality in international academic publishing business. The scholars suggested that an institutional key index list well functions as a guideline for research publication assessment and as a market unification device.

Khadilkar (2018) also focused on reasons for rejection, highlighting them as "Poor Methodology," "Similar papers," "Case report not rare," "Plagiarism, Conflict of interest," "No new information," "Out of scope for journal," "Ethical issues," "Poor Statistics," "Poor scientific content," "Poor Language," "Poor references," "Tall Claims," "Case report of low priority," "Incomplete data," "Revision not good," and "Author issues."

Mukherjee (2018) also grouped the usual problems leading to rejection into editorial and technical ones and referred to the editorial problems as bad formatting, submission to a wrong journal, falling beyond the journal's aim and scope, incomprehensibility of the submitted paper, sub-standard writing and not conforming to the style of the journal. The technical problems were also failure of the paper to add value to the journal, unclear hypothesis, poor analysis, lack of supporting evidence, wrong methodology, violation of ethics and inconclusive result.

### ***Research Question***

This study tries to answer the following question: "What are the perceptions of the Physical Education content experts and Ph.D. student writers on the problems and challenges of paper submission to the English-language medium journals for publication?"

### **3. Method**

This qualitative study was conducted to address the research question, "What are the perceptions of the Physical Education content experts and Ph.D. student writers on the

problems and challenges of paper submission to the English-language medium journals for publication?” For this study, interviews were conducted with nine content experts of Physical Education and four students of Physical Education. The interviews aimed to retrieve data on the perceptions of the Physical Education Ph.D. students and the Physical Education journal editors and content experts, who presented a fine survey of the current standing of Iranian Physical Education Ph.D. students in writing research manuscripts, especially the abstract part, for publication in the international top-tier English-medium scientific (Physical Education) journals. They presented their attitudes and perceptions on the problems and challenges of the Physical Education Ph.D. students in writing research articles in general and the research article abstracts in particular for the purpose of publication. The features of the methodology are as follows:

### **3.1. Participants**

For this qualitative study, interviews were conducted with nine distinguished Ph.D. and MSc/MA instructors and professors of Physical Education in Iranian well-reputed universities, who were selected on purposive sampling method. Two of them were female and seven were male, falling within the age range of 37-66. The experts, who are busy teaching many Physical Education Exercise Science courses in both public and private universities, were graduates of Physical Education from universities in and out of Iran, including such English-speaking countries as the UK and the US, and had rich publication history with high impact factor papers. Furthermore, they were journal editors at present time. Furthermore, among the interviewees were four Ph.D. candidates of Physical Education, the Sports Management sub-discipline, who had the experience of submitting manuscripts to the local and international English-medium journals and had good English language knowledge. Pseudonyms were given to the interviewees for the sake of anonymity.

### **3.2. Instrument**

In-depth audio-taped semi-structured interviews, lasting for around half an hour on the average, included two parts. The first part asked about the bio information of the participants like name and surname, age, sex, degree of proficiency in language, degree of familiarity with technology and publication history as well as the field the interviewees were majoring or taught in university. The second part included six open-ended questions followed by a statement of informed consent. The interviewees were asked about problems and challenges of the Physical Education doctoral students and the techniques and strategies they use to overcome the challenges and the kind of instruction that can be provided to eliminate the intricacy.

### **3.3. Data Collection and Analysis**

The data thus obtained was carefully transcribed and read at least four times and then emailed to the interviewees to verify the authenticity of data. The transcriptions underwent thematic analysis in accordance with Creswell (2012) guidelines and the theory of Glaser and Strauss (1967) for initial, selective and axial coding and categorization and sub-categorization. In the open coding, the transcribed interviews were divided into smaller parts and read line by line to identify the initial codes. The unit of analysis was sentence and the messages each contained with respect to the Physical Education students' problems and challenges. The parts of each sentence containing related information were highlighted and counted and their frequencies of



1.3. Problem with Grammar and Syntax	9					2	1	2	4	1
1.3.1. Problem with Subject-Verb Agreement						1	4			5
1.3.2. Singular-Plural Problem						1				1
1.3.3. Problem with Tenses						3				2
1.3.4. Problem with Voice						1	1			2
1.3.5. Problem with Prepositions	1					2				2
1.3.6. Problem with Adjectives						1				1
1.3.7. Problem with Apostrophe `s`						1				1
1.4. Problem with Clarity	6			2			1	6	1	6
1.4.1. Long Sentences							1			1
1.4.2. Complex Sentences			3							3
1.4.3. Wrong Translation			1							1
1.4.3.1. Wrong Equivalents			1				1			2
1.4.3.2. Word-for-Word Translation										2
1.4.3.3. Machine Translations (Google Translate)	7	1	2		1	5		2	2	0
1.5. Problem with Discourse										
1.5.1. Problem with Cohesion and Coherence							1			1
1.5.2. Problem with Rhetorical Moves		1			1	2	3			7
1.5.3. Problem with Abstract Organization			1					1		2
1.6. Problem with Mechanics of Writing										
1.6.1. Problem with Capitalization	3									3
1.6.2. Problem with Punctuation	1		3					2		6
1.6.3. Problem with Spacing			2					2		4
1.6.4. Typing Difficulty			1			1	1			3
1.6.5. Problem with Spelling								1		1
1.7. Problem with Academic Writing										
1.7.1. Not Knowing the Style	1		2		3	1	3		7	7
1.7.2. Different Writing Systems	2									2
1.7.3. Governance of American Style English Writing Style	1									1
1.7.4. Lack of Summarizing Skill				2		1	1	6	5	5
1.7.5. Lack of Paraphrasing Skill							1	8		1
1.7.6. Lack of Re-Writing Skill			1				1			2
1.7.7. Lack of Proofreading Skill							1			1
1.7.8. Spin (Plagiarism, Copying and Pasting)							8			8
1.7.9. Not Reviewing Before Submission			1							1
1.7.10. Ethics Issue		3	4							7
1.8. Problem with Abstract in Particular										
1.8.1. Problem with Abstract Organization	1	8	1	3				5	2	0

1.8.2. Not Being Aware of Abstract Writing						3	3		
1.8.3. Problem with Writing Affiliations	1						1		
1.8.4. Problem with Writing Keywords	1	4			3		8		
1.8.5. Problem with Writing Title	1	2					3		
1.8.6. Problem with Writing References	2						2		
<b>2. Problem with Content</b>									
2.1. Content Problems	1				2	2	1	6	
2.1.1. Duplication of Data					1			1	
2.1.2. Weak Research					1	1		2	
2.1.3. Wrong Methodology	3				1			4	
2.1.4. Not Reflecting Main Results		1			1			2	
2.1.5. Lacking Critical Data		2			6			8	
2.1.6. No Novelty					3			3	
<b>3. Problem with Journals</b>									
3-1 Unawareness of Journal Exclusive Writing									
3.1.1. Non-Conformity to Journal Styles and Format	2	1			1	3	1	8	
3.1.2. Unawareness of Journal Author Guide					2			2	
3.2. Being Not Aware of Manuscript Submission to Journals									
3.2.1. Unawareness of Journal Approach	4							4	
3.2.2. Lack of Information on the Scope of Target Journal Subject	1							1	
3.3. Disciplinary Issues									
3-3-1 Publication Being Easy for certain Sports Disciplines	1				2			3	
3-3-2 Number of Journals for Publication Is High for Certain Sports Disciplines	2				4			6	
3-3-3 English Writing in Some Sports Disciplines is Easier	1	1					1	3	
<b>4. Demotivating Factors</b>									
4-1 Publication Critics									
4.1.1. Lack of Fairness	1				8			9	
4.1.2. Fraud					1			1	
4.1.3. Research Article (Abstract) Rejected for Being Written by a Student	1							1	
4.1.4. Abstract Not Important for Publication by Certain Journals					2			2	
4-2 English Dominance									
4.2.1. English-Only Publication	1							1	
4.2.2. English Not Being Native Language			1	1				2	
4-3 Academic Demotivating Factors									
4.3.1. Force and Pressure	1							1	
4-4 Extraterritorial Challenges									
4-4-1 Politics (Nationality and Sanctions)	4				1			5	
4-5 Education System	1	1			1	1	1	3	8





**Table 2.** Frequencies of *Present Needs (Problems and Challenges) of Physical Education Ph.D. Students for Publication Purpose Writing of English Research Article Abstracts (RAAs)*

No.	Category	F.	Sub-Category	F.	Theme
1	Problem with Language (No or Least Proficiency in EGAP and ESAP)	281	1-1 Problem with Vocabulary	19	1-1-1 Poor Vocabulary Knowledge 1-1-2 Problem with Usage of Technical Terminology 1-1-3 Failure to Distinguish Semantic Differences 1-1-4 Wrong Word Choice 1-1-5 The Lexical Problem of Polysemy
			1-2 Problem with Grammar and Syntax	28	1-2-1 Problem with Subject-Verb Agreement 1-2-2 Singular-Plural Problem 1-2-3 Problem with Tenses 1-2-4 Problem with Voice 1-2-5 Problem with Prepositions 1-2-6 Problem with Adjectives 1-2-7 Problem with Apostrophe `s`
			1-3 Problem with Clarity	46	1-3-1 Long Sentences 1-3-2 Complex Sentences 1-3-3 Wrong Translation 1-3-4 Wrong Equivalents 1-3-5 Word-for-Word Translation 1-3-6 Machine Translations (Google Translate)
			1-4 Problem with Discourse	10	1-4-1 Problem with Cohesion and Coherence 1-4-2 Problem with Rhetorical Moves 1-4-3 Problem with Abstract Organization
			1-5 Problem with Mechanics of Writing	15	1-5-1 Problem with Capitalization 1-5-2 Problem with Punctuation 1-5-3 Problem with Spacing 1-5-4 Typing Difficulty 1-5-5 Problem with Spelling
			1-6 Academic Writing Problems	75	1-6-1 Not Knowing the Style 1-6-2 Different Writing Systems 1-6-3 Governance of American Style English Writing Style 1-6-4 Lack of Summarizing Skill 1-6-5 Lack of Paraphrasing Skill 1-6-6 Lack of Re-Writing Skill 1-6-7 Lack of Proofreading Skill 1-6-8 Spin (Plagiarism, Copying and Pasting) 1-6-9 Not Reviewing Before Submission 1-6-10 Ethics Issue
			1-7 Problem with Abstract in Particular	37	1-7-1 Problem with Abstract Organization 1-7-2 Problem with Writing Affiliations 1-7-3 Problem with Writing Keywords 1-7-4 Problem with Writing Title

					<b>1-7-5</b> Problem with Writing References
<b>2</b>	Problem with Content	25	<b>2-1</b> Content Problems	25	<b>2-1-1</b> Duplication of Data <b>2-1-2</b> Weak Research <b>2-1-3</b> Wrong Methodology <b>2-1-4</b> Not Reflecting Main Results <b>2-1-5</b> Lacking Critical Data <b>2-1-6</b> No Novelty
<b>3</b>	Problem with Journals	27	<b>3-1</b> Unawareness of Journal Exclusive Writing	10	<b>3-1-1</b> Non-Conformity to Journal Styles and Format <b>3-1-2</b> Unawareness of Journal Author Guide
			<b>3-2</b> Unawareness of Journal Submission	5	<b>3-2-1</b> Unawareness of Journal Approach before Deciding to Submit <b>3-2-2</b> Lack of Information on the Scope of Target Journal Subject when Deciding to Submit Manuscript
			<b>3-3</b> Disciplinary Issues	12	<b>3-3-1</b> Publication Being Easy for certain Sports Disciplines <b>3-3-2</b> Number of Journals for Publication Is High for Certain Sports Disciplines <b>3-3-3</b> English Writing in Some Sports Disciplines is Easier
<b>4</b>	Demotivating Factors	180	<b>4-1</b> Publication Critics	13	<b>4-1-1</b> Lack of Fairness <b>4-1-2</b> Fraud and Cheating <b>4-1-3</b> Research Article (Abstract) Rejected for Being Written by a Student <b>4-1-4</b> Abstract Not Important for Publication Judgment by Certain Journals
			<b>4-2</b> English Dominance	3	<b>4-2-1</b> English-Only Publication <b>4-2-2</b> English Not Being Native Language
			<b>4-3</b> Academic Demotivating Factors	1	<b>4-3-1</b> Force and Pressure
			<b>4-4</b> Extraterritorial Challenges	5	<b>4-4-1</b> Politics (Nationality and Sanctions)
			<b>4-5</b> Education System	78	<b>4-5-1</b> Wrong Teaching Methodology <b>4-5-2</b> No Appropriate Textbooks and Sources for Study <b>4-5-3</b> Lack of any English Research Article Writing Course <b>4-5-4</b> Unqualified Instructors <b>4-5-5</b> Lack of Time and Not Enough Exposure
			<b>4-6</b> Psychological and Cognitive Factors	7	<b>4-6-1</b> Passive Students <b>4-6-2</b> Verbal Thinking <b>4-6-3</b> Not Enough Study <b>4-6-4</b> Lack of Self-Confidence

				4-6-5 Not Reviewing Manuscript Before Submission
		4-7 No Writing Assistance	5	4-7-1 No Co-Authorship 4-7-2 No Literacy Brokers 4-7-3 Supervisor Usually Not Available 4-7-4 No Academic Writing Model
		4-8 Technology Illiteracy	68	4-8-1 No Right Google Checking 4-8-2 No International Links 4-8-3 Not Being Well Familiar with Word Processor 4-8-4 Unfamiliarity with Plagiarism Checker 4-8-5 Unfamiliarity with Grammarly 4-8-6 No Skill of Web Browsing

Note. \*CE=Content Expert \*\*S=Student

The details of the comments are provided in this article under four different headings, in proportion to the Table 2 information:

#### 4.1. Linguistic Problems

All the experts and Ph.D. students of Physical Education unanimously believed the English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) and English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) were accountable for problems in 99.9 percent of cases and posed stern and acute challenges on the way of publication of the Physical Education Ph.D. student writers' manuscripts in the related disciplines. What follows are areas of difficulty, problem and challenge on hierarchy of importance:

Extract 1 (Content Expert 6 –CE6):

“The most important problem with the manuscripts that both students and instructors submit to the English-medium journals is poor English.”

Student 4 (S4) also believed that students of Physical Education suffer poor English, while believing that English proficiency will make the student writers self-confident:

Extract 2 (Student 4 – S4):

“Since majority of students of Physical Education are not competent in language, so they do not have necessary self-confidence in writing research papers in English.”

##### 4.1.1. Lexis and Syntax

Almost all of the experts and students believed in presence of the lexico-grammatical problems in the student manuscripts, including the abstract part. They said most of the writers had not enough proficiency in appropriate usage of technical vocabulary, were unable to choose the right word, failed to distinguish semantic differences and represented wrong collocations in their works. What follow are the extracts pointing to the lexico-grammatical problems:

Extract 3 (Expert 1 – CE1):

“One more reason is wrong usage of the terminologies whose meaning will become different with what is really intended. Take the word ‘Public Sports.’ In our discipline the writer may

write 'Public sports', while is translated wrongly as "Sport for all" which might also be referred to as "Recreational sport."

Extract 4 (Expert 3 – CE3):

"There is a term in sports with multiple meanings: 'Lactate.' That's 'lactic acid' in Physical Education. In general, 'lactate' means 'a milking woman,' mentioned in a Physical Education book. The translator had not the required knowledge in Physical Education, thus failing to translate it well. The translator should have translated it as 'lactic acid.'"

Student 1 also confirmed the point and said the unqualified translators and those helping the Ph.D. student writers are not well familiar with the content, so when co-authoring the wrong transfer of concepts do occur:

Extract 5 (Student 1 – S1):

"They do not know of proper use of certain words: The difference between 'effect' and 'impact.'"

As for grammar and syntax, the experts and students believed that major areas of problems, that mainly stem from lack of knowledge on grammatical rules, are observed in failure to properly observe the 'subject-verb agreement,' 'tenses,' 'active voice,' 'plurals and singular forms,' adequate use of 'prepositions' like the preposition 'of', of 'adjectives,' of 'apostrophe 's, s', while having problems with sentence structures.

Content Expert 1 said:

Extract 6 (Expert 1 – CE1):

"Many locally published English-medium journals contain articles being full of grammar problems."

Student 1 believed,

Extract 7 (Student 1 – S1):

"The Physical Education students are not well using passives despite their crucial importance. They have also problems with prepositions, adjectives and apostrophe 's.'"

#### *4.1.2. Discourse and Rhetorical Features*

The ESAP-EGAP challenges and problems are further subdivided into problems with discourse, mechanics of writing, clarity and academic writing in general. As far as problems discourse is concerned, the experts and students believed that the novice and early carrier writers have a problems with writing moves and rhetorical structures in the best possible manner.

Content Expert 3 said:

Extract 8 (Expert 3 – CE3):

"As far as I know, introduction (move 1) has the least frequency of occurrence in abstracts. Authors write mostly in accordance with the structure."

Student 2 said,

Extract 9 (Student 2 – S9):

“We have problems with cohesion; we have really problems in those respects.”

#### 4.1.3. Unclear Texts

The experts and students also referred to clarity problems that made the “ambiguous” texts difficult to be understood by the readers and journal peer-reviewers. As evidences they referred to usage of long and complicated sentences and the texts produced by translators and machine translations like Google Translate.

Expert 4 held,

Extract 10 (Expert 4 – CE 4):

“We use a long sentence without segmenting it into several short sentences and separate them with *comas* and the like. We try to finish three sentences with a single verb. They set as ambiguous sentences.”

Student 2 pointed out,

Extract 11 (Student 2 – S2):

“I have witnessed cases when a person has translated words from Farsi to English word by word, which renders meaningless concepts.”

#### 4.1.4. Absence of Writing Skills

Regarding the experts and students referred to absence of such skills as summarizing, paraphrasing, re-writing, proofreading, and editing and revision skills.

Expert 4 believed,

Extract 12 (Expert 4 – CE4):

“Our students can’t paraphrase. Reading three sentences, they can’t provide gist of their concept. They try to copy all the three sentences. They can’t offer the concept in other words. This gives way to plagiarism”

Student 2 expressed his opinion on the subject in another way.

Extract 13 (Student 2 – S2):

“We have a problem with paraphrasing. There are many instances of violation while writing manuscript.”

#### 4.1.5. Problem with Observing Mechanics of Writing

As for problem with mechanics of writing, the experts and students expressed instances of failures in punctuation, spelling, spacing, and clean typing.

Expert 1 said,

Extract 14 (Expert 1 – CE1):

“Problems with keywords and capitalization are instances of problems (that Physical Education Ph.D. students have).”

Student 2 also believed,

Extract 15 (Student 2 – S2):

“The writers do not usually observe rules on punctuation like commas, semicolon, colon, parentheses and the like.”

#### *4.1.6. Problem with Writing the Abstract Part*

Exclusively on problems of writing the abstract part, the experts and students had diversified opinions. They referred to problems with writing abstract part, including writing effective titles, keywords, affiliation and different moves, containing critical information.

Expert 4 expressed his/her opinion on the problem this way:

Extract 16 (Expert 4 – CE4):

“They take keywords from the title, while they should reflect on what the article revolves around.”

Expert 9 said,

In connection with language related problems that lead to poor writing of abstracts, experts 2 and 9 referred to student writers' not reading similar articles before starting to write:

Extract 17 (Expert 2 – CE2):

“One more major problem has been the fact that students are not readers of the best world journals.”

Extract 18 (Expert 9 – CE9):

“Reading is important and is absolutely helpful. Anybody not good at reading, will not be good at writing as well.”

#### *4.2. Problem with the Content*

The experts and students said content and technical issues account for other aspect of problems leading to poor and badly written research articles, including the abstract part. In the content part, they referred to lack of enough knowledge on research, methodology, statistics, data collection and analysis and the related knowledge. Reference was also made to non-observation of ethics.

Expert 2 held,

Extract 19 (Expert 2 – CE2):

“Secondly, they have a problem with methodology in Physical Education. One more point is ethics.”

Student 2 posed his perception this way:

Extract 20 (Student 2 – S2):

“We have a problem with competency in the content. A reviewer, who does not know Farsi and reads the manuscript in English, comes across with a situation that there are no variables in the submitted manuscript.”

#### *4.3. Problem with Journals*

The content experts and students said the student writers' research articles, including the abstract part, are problematic due to their low level or no familiarity with journal style, format and guide and wrong journal choice. The problems they say may also be caused due to disciplinary issues.

Expert 1 referred to some journal related disciplinary issues:

Extract 21 (Expert 1 – CE1):

“The problem with Physical Education and many other disciplines, that have many sub-disciplines, is that acceptance of the submitted manuscripts is easier for certain sub-disciplines while is hard and difficult for certain others.”

Expert 4 mentioned the problem this way:

Extract 22 (Expert 4 – CE4):

“The rate of problems is higher in Sports Management. There are rare such cases in the Exercise Physiology.”

#### *4.4. Demotivating Factors*

‘Publication Critics,’ ‘English Dominance,’ ‘Academic Demotivating Factors,’ ‘Extraterritorial Challenges,’ ‘Education System,’ ‘Psychological and Cognitive Factors,’ ‘No Writing Assistance,’ and ‘Technology Illiteracy,’ were mentioned as factors that do demotivate the Physical Education Ph.D. student writers in writing research articles in English language for publication in the English-language journals both inside or overseas and internationally.

##### *4.4.1. Publication Critics*

The experts and students cited some critical issues in the field of English for Research for Publication Purposes (ERPP) and as instances of which they highlighted lack of fairness, cheating and fraud and the submitted research article being rejected by journals just because they were written by a student.

As for unfairness, expert 1 said,

Extract 23 (Expert 1 – CE1):

“This (the rejection) should be blamed on the unfair reviewer investigating the manuscript.”

Expert 8 referred to cheating:

Extract 24 (Expert 8 – CE8):

“In my opinion, they (the students) give their work to some companies that are in contract with some journals. I have been witnessing that some of the research articles in poor quality regarding structure and content are published anyway. There are yet some very strong articles that are not published in the journal. This is because cheating is at work.”

##### *4.4.2. Politics*

Expert 2 also referred to politics and western sanctions, imposed on Iran, and said the problems with rejection stem from Iranians, failing to use such software as Lisrel and PLS, because Iran



is subject to sanctions and such software cannot be thus used. The reviewer, reading papers, submitted by Iranians, will immediately reject them just because of such a political problem.

Extract 25 (Expert 2 – CE2):

“They want licenses while we do not have it. Well, this will result in rejection. The journal does not look for the reasons of using Lisrel. They notice Lisrel is used. They conclude that’s an Iranian. So, order rejection of the manuscript.”

Expert 1 referred to reviewers’ rejection of papers, just because the papers are submitted by students, who are novice and early carrier writers.

Extract 26 (Expert 1 – CE1):

“I have been witnessing that journals repeatedly refer a submitted manuscript to the student writer up to the point to be ensured of the student’s writing it itself.”

Expert 2 referred to one more point: Abstract no having any position in manuscript publication.

Extract 27 (Expert 2 – CE2):

“It is not the cause of rejection or acceptance.”

#### 4.4.3. *English Dominance*

‘English Dominance,’ represented in the form of ‘English-Only Publication,’ and the fact that English is not native language of the Non-Native English language writers in the Physical Education discipline in Iran were said to be other root causes of poor quality papers, written and submitted to journals for publication by the Iranian Physical Education Ph.D. student writers.

On the issue, expert 5 said:

Extract 28 (Content Expert 5 -CE5):

“English is not the native language for them.”

#### 4.4.4. *English-Only Publication*

Experts 4 and 5 also elaborated on the problem of English as the only medium of publication, causing force and pressure on the Non-Native English writers of the Ph.D. students of Physical Education:

Extract 29 (Content Expert 2 –CE2):

“The student look for necessities out of force or interest.”

Extract 30 (Content Expert 5 –CE5):

“That’s a challenge posed by the journals, published in their mother language English, especially the journals in the countries that English is their first language.”

#### 4.4.4. *Problematic Education System*

‘Problematic Education System’ was among other problems, highlighted by the interviewees. They referred to ‘Wrong Teaching Methodology,’ used by the ESAP and EGAP instructors, as well as ‘Unavailability of Appropriate Textbooks and Sources for Study,’ ‘Lack of any English

Research Article Writing Course,' and 'Unqualified Instructors' as well as 'Lack of Time,' and 'Not Enough Exposure' as sub-categories under the category of 'Problematic Education System.'

On the issue, the content expert 7 says:

Extract 31 (Content Expert 7 –CE7):

“No good is done (in the educational system) usually. In the BSc/BA level (of the Physical Education Course), the English instructor presents a single sheet passage to the class and it takes four sessions long for the class to understand it.”

Expert 9 for his part said,

Extract 32 (Content Expert 9 –CE9):

“English educational system is one of the major shortcomings of our country. English language teaching in Iran is the weakest such system worldwide.”

#### *4.4.4.1. Unqualified Instructors*

Expert 7 and student 3 said the instructors in the Physical Education tertiary level classes used wrong methodology, i.e. Grammar Translation Method (GTM), which accounted for poor knowledge of the students, thus resulting in poor quality English research papers and eventually their rejection by the peer reviewers.

Expert 4 believed,

Extract 33 (Content Expert 4 –CE4):

“Yes; unfortunately, they (the instructors) do not know English Research Article writing.”

Expert 7 also opined,

Extract 34 (Content Expert 7 –CE7):

“Our instructors are not competent enough in Language. Most of them do not even know anything about structures of the Persian text, let alone English.”

#### *4.4.4.2. Inappropriate English Course*

Expert 2 believed that there was no appropriate course:

Extract 35 (Content Expert 2 –CE2):

“In the Ph.D. level there is no English Academic Writing Course to inform the student of the latest in the field. We have nothing to expect the student to write in English.”

#### *4.4.4.3. Inappropriate Textbooks*

Expert 2 also believed there was no simple and appropriate book used by the Physical Education students, resulting in low proficiency in writing English paper.

Extract 36 (Content Expert 2 –CE2):

“Go to Enghelab Street book stores; you will find 50 research method books but rarely can you find one with easy to understand texts.”

#### 4.4.4.4. Psychological and Cognitive Factors

Among other problems, falling under the category of the psychological and cognitive factors, were those related to the students themselves due to their passiveness and their verbal thinking (thinking in Farsi /L1 and then writing in English) and lack of self-confidence and not reviewing before manuscript submission.

Expert 2 said one more problem in the area is that students themselves are passive, which leads to poor and low quality papers.

Extract 37 (Expert 2 – CE2):

“One more major problem has been the fact that students are not readers of the best world journals. First of all they should study extensively.”

#### 4.4.4.5. No Writing Assistance

The participants in the interview also referred to lack of any writing assistance, which resulted in students writing alone and the poor quality of their papers. As instances of lack of assistance, references were made to no co-authorship, lack of any literacy brokers, supervisor usually being not available and lack of any academic writing model.

Student 3 believes:

Extract 38 (Student 3 – S3):

“When abroad on a sabbatical study, I realized that the door of the supervisor is always open to the student writers. This is while in Iran there are rare such cases.”

#### 4.4.4.6. Technological Illiteracy

The findings also led the researcher to another category in the list of problems: “Technology Illiteracy” Under the category, there were such sub-categories as ‘No Right Google Checking and Web Browsing,’ ‘No International Links,’ ‘Not Being Well Familiar with Word Processor,’ ‘Unfamiliarity with Plagiarism Checker,’ and ‘Unfamiliarity with Grammarly software.’

Regarding lack of technological literacy, expert 4 said,

Extract 39 (Expert 4 – CE4):

“Here, our students do not know Google checking or web browsing to find helpful information. Our students do not even know how to build international contacts with the more content experts to write more effectively.”

## 5. Discussion

Alike other scholars, referred to in the literature, content experts and Ph.D. students of Physical Education cited a number of challenges and gains that the Physical Education manuscript writers do experience. The gains that they mentioned were ‘prestige,’ ‘promotion,’ and ‘visibility’ (Giraldo, 2019; Rezaei & Seyri, 2019) and the challenges that the interviewees highlighted were ‘the English-Only Publication,’ ‘Publish-or-Perish’ (Atai, Karimi, & Asadnia., 2018), ‘Journal Formats,’ ‘Bias’, and ‘English Language.’

The interviewees referred to the discursive/linguistic and non-discursive (non-linguistic) problems, facing the manuscript writers of Physical Education. All (100%) the participants

noted that language, especially grammar and specialized terminology and words, are the most important needs of all the students, who wish to publish Research Article (RA), which also includes the crucial abstract part, in the local, or international journals, where medium of publication is the English language. Content Expert 1 (CE1) and Content Expert 7 (CE7) both believed that many rich-in-content articles are rejected just because of poor English. Student 4 (S4) also believed that students of Physical Education suffer poor English, while believing that English proficiency will make the student writers self-confident.

Overall, all the Physical Education content experts and students considered English as “indispensable tool in their academic career” and were highly interested in removal of the writing problems, mostly linguistic ones, on the way. The finding concurs with the view of Chien (2019), who referred to language as an “indispensable tool” in the academic career. The finding also falls in the same vein with results of studies by Webber and Mungra (2010), Tahririan and Sadri (2013), Zare et al. (2016), Khatri, Varma, & Budhwar (2017), Atai et al. (2018), Jaafari et al. (2018), McKinley and Rose (2018), Giraldo (2019), Rezaei and Seyri (2019), Mansouri Nejad, Qaracholloo, and Rezaei, (2019), and Nezakatgoo and Fathi (2019) that language-use problems, hurdles and challenges are major obstacles on the way of Non-Native English Speakers’ (NNESS) scientific publication. Rezaei and Seyri (2019) noted that a wide spectrum of “hurdles” are on the way of the NNESS’ scientific publication. They cited extracts which referred to the native-like manuscripts following easy roads to publication due their high linguistic proficiency level, including mastery of words and syntactic structures and grammar.

Content experts emphasized competence over the area of knowledge in the discipline a scholar is going to write. They said it did not mean that language importance should be overlooked as they are complementary. The finding falls in line with that of a study by Tahririan and Sadri (2013) that reviewers heavily commented on importance of content as the vehicle for scientific rigor of scholarly contribution, while believing that language importance should not be underestimated as many content information sharing failures and dark points are result of inability to use language properly.

Content experts and students of Sports Management, which is a Physical Education sub-discipline and a humanities branch of study, believed in significance of knowing the move structure of their research article, including the abstract part, while content experts of the Exercise Physiology and corrective medicine, that are two sub-disciplines of Physical Education and branches of experimental science whose article follow definite moves, prioritized language use, i.e. grammar and lexis, over rhetorical moves. This finding of current interview study falls in the same vein with that of Zare et al. (2016). The scholars found that scholars in the field of science prioritized “lexis and syntax over discourse and rhetorics” regarding presence of already definite discipline specific move patterns, which made their usage and identification times easier (Zare et al., 2016). The case for the researchers in humanities was different as they had to know moves in different sections of their article (Zare et al., 2016).

A group of content experts and students referred to a number of demotivating factors such as ‘English abstract not being regarded as a criterion for the locally-published journals’ peer-

review judgment,' and it's not been a party for likely acceptance/rejection of the submitted manuscript; therefore, the Ph.D. students are not motivated to spend any time and effort to learn and practice its writing. Certain content experts also believed that it might not be a criterion of manuscript acceptance for certain international journals as well. The viewpoints are in contrast to a finding by Von Elm *et al.* (2003), cited by Pierson (2004), who believed in importance of abstract in acceptance of a manuscript. The scholars said that only 44% of a total of 19,123 abstracts, accepted for presentation at 234 meetings between 1957 and 1999, were published as full papers within six years later. Pierson (2004) holds, "Not more than about half of the work presented in abstract form is subsequently published." Content Expert 3 (CE3) in this study, however, believed that abstract is important for publication in the international journals, which required citations in the section of the research manuscript.

Content expert 1 (CE1) believed that it was times easier for an Exercise Physiology and Sport Medicine scholar to publish manuscript than the Sports Management scholar regarding the fact that definite moves are absent in the Sports Management journals. The comment is supported by a corpus study finding (Saeedi & Gholipour, 2019) that Sports Management research article abstracts headed for move erosion. The Sport Medicine abstracts, published in reputed journals of Iran, India and the US, were on the contrary. They were loyal to Hyland's (2000) five-move model of I-P-M-R-C. Furthermore, the EC1 held that language-use is the distinguished problem of Iranian Physical Education Ph.D. writers of research articles, including the abstract part, as English is not their native language. The EC1 comments supported the finding of Giraldo (2019) that time, discipline and language proficiency are the key challenges on the way of Non-Native English Speaking multilingual writers. The finding is missing in the literature and can be accounted for novelty feature of this study.

Furthermore, the experts and students criticized absence of any course on English Research Article writing in academic curricula. The result is consistent with finding of Rezaei and Seyri (2019) that provided extracts of the interview participants, who said they had no "special courses" in proportion to the graduation needs.

The experts and students were unhappy with a number of unqualified ESAP and EGAP instructors, who are busy teaching in the academic environment to the BA/BS, MA/MS or Ph.D. students and believed that it affected quality of the students' writing in English language. The finding is in agreement with that of Rezaei and Seyri (2019) who quoted participants in their study as saying that their difficulty in publication was due to their failure to be trained adequately for the purpose. They believed they had not received "sufficient instruction" on academic writing.

A number of content experts and students, participating in interviews, believed in allocation of insufficient time for academic writing practice in Iranian academia. The result is in agreement with the finding of a study by Giraldo (2019).

Content experts in this study referred to the Physical Education manuscript writers' facing political challenges like nationality and sanctions, which resulted in Iran's deprivation of getting licenses of such software as Lisrel and PLS whose absence degraded quality of the submitted papers and then their ultimate rejection due to the license sanctions. The finding on the matter of politics such as the absence of licenses of certain statistical software, let's say

Lisrel and PLS, that is not available to Iranians due to sanctions, falls in the same vain with studies by a number of scholars. Rezaee and Seyri (2019) in their study well referred to rejection due to political reasons, which posed hurdles to scholarly publication. The researchers introduced nationality as a political reason for occasional rejection of the submitted articles. “When Iranian academics submit their papers, some journals react and judge politically and sometimes reject the papers without considering their contents or sending them to reviewers” (Rezaei & Seyri, 2019).

The interview participants in this study referred to a number of strategies that the student writers use for manuscript writing like using the Google Translate software or using L1 (Farsi) for manuscript writing. They also suggested some techniques to be used for manuscript and abstract writing instruction like using literacy brokers such as translators and editors or building links with scholars overseas. The views are consistent with the views of Atai et al. (2018), Jaafari et al. (2018), Giraldo (2019), Rezaei and Seyri (2019) and Mansouri Nejad et al. (2020).

The experts and students, participating in interviews in this study, also called for support for the Ph.D. student writers to write manuscripts for scholarly publication. This finding is in agreement with results of studies by Mansouri Nejad *et al.* (2020) and Rezaei and Seyri (2019). The supports were cited to be in the form of right and to-the-point instruction, (e-) workshops; literacy brokers, guidance on journal style/choice and submission guidelines and use of technological affordances. Among other forms of support, mentioned by the participants and the researchers were coaching, co-authorship and co-research and inclusion of English research article writing course in the academic syllabus.

The experts and students in this study asked for guidance on journal style and choice and providing student writers with submission guidelines. This view is in conformity with a study by Mansouri Nejad *et al.* (2020) and Rezaei and Seyri (2019).

As seen in the results section, the CE1 was critic of the English-only world of publication and journals, calling for freer atmosphere for scholarly and community expertise and information sharing. The attitude is in agreement with the ideology of such critic scholars as Campanario & Acedo (2007), Shohamy (2006), Rezaei and Seyri (2019) also referred to it under the heading “Center-Periphery Priorities.”

The Physical Education Ph.D. students’ ability to write in both Persian and English was an advantage for them and it should be regarded in line with Bourdieu’s (1991) social practice theory which holds that multilingual scholars have the advantage of writing and publishing in more than one language.

## **6. Conclusion**

The study was conducted with regards to the importance of identifying the research publication problems of the Physical Education academic writers in their pursuit of dissemination of disciplinary and scholarly information in the bi-/multi-literate environments. It yielded invaluable results, showing that linguistic and non-linguistic problems were both on the way of the writers as they endeavor for publication. Technology problems, referred to in interviews with Physical Education content experts and Ph.D. students, stand as the novelty feature of this research, which should be taken into consideration in course planning and organization of

related English research courses and workshops by both subject and language experts and officials.

Like any other research, this study faced a number of limitations: It did not have the participants, who simultaneously with the interviews started submitting their manuscripts to the ISI journals, whose reviewing takes almost a year for decision for publication. Acknowledging the limitation, the researcher suggests future researchers to consider this important issue. Furthermore, regarding the suggestions and problematic points referred to by the interviewees, the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) scholars and course designers are suggested to adjust writing guidance and tips with the areas of student failures and dark points that are specified by the journal reviewers following reviewing of the student writers' submitted manuscripts. The reason is that students need to be provided with right guidance on revision and resubmission (Wincka et al., 2011) after the reviewing process and they need to write in a more qualitative way. The practice may be so helpful and promising psychologically for the early carrier researchers, who easily lose their hope and give up earlier firm resolve and motivation for publication in the top-tier journals. Within the scope of such research and by benefiting from long time available, the researchers can guide the learners and novice writers to go for another journal for publication, if the effort for revision in tune with the comments of the reviewers and editors also fails.

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