

Full Length Research Paper

Why are manuscripts unacceptable for publication? An analysis of Ethiopian Journal of Education (EJE) rejections

Berhanu Abera Kibret

Institute of Educational Research, Addis Ababa University. P. O. Box 150535, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Received 28 August, 2013; Accepted 28 November, 2015

This paper discusses reasons why manuscripts are not accepted for publication in Ethiopian Journal of Education (EJE). It intends to promote publication by domestic and/or international authors in EJE by analyzing the reasons for rejection of manuscripts. To gather the relevant data, a total of 101 rejected manuscripts submitted for publication EJE in the years 2008 to 2013 was collected and assessed. Moreover, contents of rejection letters were looked into. In doing so, the institutional affiliation of authors of the rejected manuscripts, editorial processes in which manuscripts were rejected mostly, the principal reasons for rejecting manuscripts of EJE, types of manuscripts which were more often exposed to rejection, and the nature of comments recommending rejection were analyzed. The results reveal that most of rejected manuscripts of EJE were affiliated from Addis Ababa University and Bahir Dar University, and the manuscripts were rejected mostly during the preliminary assessment, initial reviewing phase. Furthermore, using inappropriate research methods, poor data analysis and presentation, inadequacy of data to justify the conclusions, failure to follow the Journal's styles and formats (guidelines) and failure or unwilling to revise manuscripts as per reviewers' suggestions were principal reasons for rejecting manuscripts of EJE. The highest numbers of rejected manuscripts of EJE were also empirical studies which EJE accepts for publication consistently, and reviewers rejected those manuscripts after indicating their weaknesses and remarking further organization for resubmission. Finally, based on the results, the paper outlined recommendations for minimizing rejected manuscripts of EJE, and further studies were suggested.

Key words: Manuscripts, publications, peer-review, rejection.

INTRODUCTION

Writing and publishing scientific articles is an important activity of academic life. It is a vital and integral part of academic life (Gilmore et al. 2006, cited in Ligthelm and Koekemoer, 2009). Most importantly, academic publishing is the primary vehicle for the advancement of

scientific knowledge (Ligthelm and Koekemoer, 2009). Furthermore, scientific publication can serve as documentation of work performed, fostering exchange (feedback, discussion and debate) and sustainment of support and competitive funding (Lüttge). Scholarly

Email: hahupepu@yahoo.com or wantanber@yahoo.com.

Authors agree that this article remain permanently open access under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

articles are also decisive to indicate societal problems and to fill those gaps. They, besides, can serve as form of promotion in the academic world. "Publications are imperative for career advancement and for the economic survival of research departments," (Peat, 2002: 2). Specially, in tertiary institutions, academics are encouraged to publish scholarly articles; they must publish or perish.

Though the primary reason for publishing is to disseminate knowledge, its purpose seems to be shifted more in favor of promotion nowadays. In line with this, Ajao (2005) points out that many academics no longer write papers for the sake of sharing knowledge, which is the original aim of peer-reviewed journals but to have enough papers regardless of its quality to get promoted. A situation referred to as "numbers game". This, submitting manuscripts for publication numbers, may lead to a high rate of rejection in many highly rated peer-reviewed journals. On the other hand, a well-designed and well-reported study is always a good candidate for being accepted by a respected journal.

When a manuscript is submitted to peer-reviewed journal, it is undergone experts internal and external reviews. The manuscript is assessed by editorial team to decide whether it is the type of article that they want to see in their journal and, if so, whether it is of an adequate standard to be sent out for peer-reviewers. If it meets the standard, the manuscript is sent to peer-reviewers to ensure its 'publishability'. That is, reviewers help editors select the best research works for publication in their journal. As per reviewers' comments, manuscript may be acceptable or may be unacceptable for publication on many grounds.

The Ethiopian Journal of Education (EJE) is one of the peer-reviewed journals published in the area of education. It is one of the reputable scholarly journals in the Addis Ababa University, and a pioneer educational journal in Ethiopia since 1967. The journal has served as disseminating educational research outputs and sharing knowledge to the scientific community and practitioners both at home and abroad. Articles published in EJE, according to Amare (1998), were being used for teaching and reference materials. They have also been used by most post graduate students as source materials. Some of the articles were found to be useful for the development of the country's Education and Training Policy during the period of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia in 1994. Above all, many academics have got promoted their academic rank and profile as a result of the issuance of their articles in EJE.

The EJE manuscripts are mainly double-blind peer-reviewed by professionals in the area of education and other fields of study countrywide and pass through the subsequent editorial practices as stated in the Journal's publication guidelines (IER, 2011). All submitted manuscripts are preliminary assessed by the editorial

staff after acknowledging the receipt of them. To save time for authors and peer-reviewers, only those papers that seem most likely to meet the editorial criteria are sent for formal review. Those manuscripts judged by the editors to be of insufficient general interest as per the preliminary assessment criteria are rejected promptly without external review. In fact, these decisions are made based on the preliminary assessors' reports and only accepted by the Editorial Board.

Manuscripts judged to be of potential interest to the editors' readership are sent for formal review, typically to two reviewers; otherwise, it is sent back to the author(s). The Editorial Board then makes a decision based on the reviewers' comments and suggestions, from among several possibilities: accept as it is, accept with revision and reject out right. The Board, afterward, takes reviewers' criticisms seriously and goes through author's work. In cases where one reviewer alone opposes publication, editors send the manuscript to a third reviewer to resolve disputes (to 'break the tie') and/or make the final decision on acceptance. If the manuscript is positively assessed, the reviewers' comments are then communicated to the author(s). The final decision is then made receiving the revised manuscript. After the Board's acceptance of the article for publication, the copy editing is done and the issue is sent to the designated publisher.

It should be noted here that only those papers that seem most likely to meet the editorial criteria are published. Nevertheless, those papers judged by the editors or peer-reviewers to be of inappropriate as per editorial criteria are rejected promptly. Nowadays, rejection is common in EJE and perhaps for this reason many manuscripts that submitted for publication never get the chance to becoming a published journal article. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to promote publication by domestic and/or international authors in EJE by analyzing the reasons for rejection of manuscripts.

It is expected that this piece of work can serve as a feedback to IER publications in particular and other scholarly publications in Addis Ababa University in general indicating the reasons of rejecting manuscripts. From such a feedback, editors and reviewers could be aware of the existing practices of publishing scholarly articles and take necessary measures. Authors could also be knowledgeable the reasons why manuscripts are unacceptable for publication and help them to produce their research reports for the line that scientific journals editor acquire for.

Statement of the problem

Manuscripts submitted for possible publication may be rejected for numerous reasons. Several investigators have looked into the reasons for rejection of manuscripts

submitted to scientific journals for possible publication. Byrne (1998) queried editors and peer reviewers about the most common reasons for rejecting submitted manuscripts. He found out that deficiencies in the design of the study were the most commonly cited reason for outright manuscript rejection. Bordage (2001) also reported on the reasons given by peer reviewers for rejection of submitted manuscripts. This author points out that use of inappropriate statistical methods, overstating the implications of the results, poor study design and ineffective communication were some of the reasons of the rejections of manuscripts. What it more, David Pierson MD FAARC (2004) identified ten top reasons for the rejection of manuscripts submitted for publication in *Respiratory Care*. Failure to write and submit a full manuscript after presenting the abstract; failure to revise and resubmit following peer review; poor study design; inadequate description of the methods; suboptimal reporting of the results; and submitting a manuscript in a format that does not match what the Journal publishes were among the major reasons. According to Ajao (2005), lack of focus and failure to adhere to the theme of the paper contribute to paper rejection.

Ehara and Takahashi (2007) studied the reasons for rejection of electronic manuscripts submitted to *American Journal of Roentgenology (AJR)* by international authors. Their study revealed that lack of new or useful knowledge was by far the most common reason for rejection in all countries (44–76% constituted of all rejections). Daft (n.d.) also identified reasons for rejection of manuscripts submitted for publication in *Academy of Management Journal (AMJ)* and *Administrative Science Quarterly (ASQ)*. That is, while this reviewer assessed manuscript for these journals, manuscripts were rejected due to lack of theory, concepts and operationalization not in alignment, insufficient rational and in adequate research design.

In sum, the most important points emerged from the foregoing works depicted that manuscripts submitted to scientific journals are rejected due to various reasons depending on the appropriateness of manuscripts for the line that the editors acquire for. From a wider perspective, the reasons for rejecting manuscripts have been found to be closely linked with the authors' ways of reporting their research outputs. None of the literature reviews consulted for this study showed that manuscripts submitted for possible publication are rejected in case of editors.

In the Ethiopian context, the researcher believes that the problem is felt by scholarly articles publishers though it is hardly ever researched. Precisely, although an attempt was made to review local researches conducted in relation to the rejection manuscripts, it was difficult to obtain any. From experience, specifically, the researcher understood that there are high rejection rate of manuscripts submitted for publication in one of the

Ethiopian journals—the *Ethiopian Journal of Education*. By virtue of the researcher's position as an editor, he has heard different complaints about manuscripts rejection and quality of research articles published in EJE from authors, reviewers and academics. Peer-reviewers rejected many of manuscripts submitted for publication in EJE and informed the editorial body that the quality of manuscripts has been deteriorated. Authors, on the other hand, complained that their manuscripts were rejected unfairly. Readers of the EJE and academics also pointed out that the quality of some of the articles EJE publishes is questionable. This has become the critical problem facing issuance of EJE. To fill this disparity, the need for research to look into the problems of rejecting manuscripts contributed to EJE is, therefore, important as no research has been done so. In doing so, the investigation attempts to answer the following research questions:

- i) What are the reasons for rejecting manuscripts of EJE?
- ii) In which editorial processes are manuscripts rejected mostly?
- iii) Which types of manuscripts are more often exposed to rejection?
- iv) What is the institutional affiliation of authors of the rejected manuscripts like?
- v) What are the natures of comments recommending rejection?

METHODS

To gather the relevant data, a total of 101 rejected manuscripts submitted for publication EJE in the years 2008 to 2013 was collected and reviewed. That is, the contents of reviews for all the manuscripts that received “unacceptable for further review” or “unacceptable for publication” were analyzed to identify the negative aspects of rejected papers. During the analysis, lists of the reasons the reviewers gave for negative comments were categorized based on the criteria for preliminary review and peer-review. For preliminarily rejected manuscripts, four categorical schemes, such as, content of the paper, manuscript's page limit, style/format and research methods were used to tally and describe the reasons of rejection. A broad categorization scheme was also used to tally and describe the reasons for rejection of manuscripts during the major peer assessment stage based on six major categories: congruency between title and content, worthy of investigation, sufficient literature review, research methods, data analyses and presentation, and adequacy of data to justify conclusions. Besides, reviewers' additional remarks and comments recommending rejection were analyzed. In addition, contents of rejection letters were analyzed to examine the reasons for rejections. And a content analysis of reviewers' comments on randomly selected 25 negatively assessed manuscripts was made to look into the nature of assessors' comments recommending rejection.

To avoid categorization bias, the ratings and comments were analyzed in a staggered fashion according to years (i.e., 6 rejected manuscripts from 2008 followed by 17 from 2009, 25 from 2010, 14 from 2011, 14 from 2012 and 25 from 2013). Reasons (comments) were tallied only once per article. Peer-reviewers comments were

tallied based on commonalities of rejection reasons (the reasons both reviewers forwarded in common were taken). Whenever a comment could belong to more than one category of reason (e.g., research design or sampling; data gathering technique or procedure), it was assigned to the category best dictated by the context in which it appeared.

The data analysis was basically carried out qualitatively. In addition, to identify the major assessment criteria for rejection of the manuscripts and types of manuscripts more often exposed to rejection, frequency counts and percentages were used.

Procedures

The writer of this article has been authorized to manage the publication processes of the Journal without revealing the personal identifications of authors and assessors. Accordingly, names of authors and reviewers were anonymous in the use of the data for ethical clearance.

The following procedures were carried out during the study. The first phase has been a preparatory stage where an extensive review of literature was made on publishing scientific articles, editorial practices of local and international journals, reasons for unacceptable for publications scholarly articles and the like. This initial phase built an essential basis for the subsequent task, as it provides an overview of the different aspects of the research topic and the accumulated wealth of knowledge in the research theme. In the second phase, the following major activities have been done. First, list of rejected manuscripts were sorted out to generate the required data. Then, the files of rejected manuscripts were identified and reviewers' assessment reports recommending rejection were grouped into preliminary review, peer review rejections and others. Next, reviewers' comments were tallied according to the category schemes, and comments for rejecting were compiled. Eventually, a few months have been dedicated to analyze and discuss the results as related to the research questions and relevant literature.

RESULTS ANALYSIS

Rejected manuscripts of EJE and authors' institutional affiliation

The Managing Editor's Manuscripts follow up sheet shows that a total of 461 manuscripts were registered for possible publication in the Ethiopian Journal of Education from year 2008 to 2013. From them, 6 manuscripts in 2008; 17 in 2009; 25 in 2010; 14 in 2011; 14 in 2012; and 25 in 2013 were rejected (that is, 21.91% of the manuscripts were rejected) as illustrated below.

The above figure depicts that rejecting manuscripts submitted for publication in EJE is increasing year to year between the years 2008 and 2013. The rejection rate exceeds the acceptance rate in the six years.

In the years 1967–1998, almost half of IER publications (EJE; IER Flambeau; IER Proceedings; Admas) were produced by IER full-time staff (Amare, 1998). Addis Ababa University's academics also shared the majority of authorship of the Institute's publications at that juncture. It is also said that most of manuscripts published in EJE are authored by Addis Ababa University staff then Bahir

Dar University. A study conducted by Tesfaye (2011) also confirmed that the lion's share of EJE contributors comes principally from Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar Universities while other major universities were underrepresented or virtually non-existent. It is often criticized that manuscripts from other intuitions are failed to be issued, they are rejected. Having this in mind, an attempt was made to see the institutional affiliation of authors of the rejected manuscripts. Table 1 shows this.

As illustrated in Table 1, most of the authors of rejected manuscripts were from Addis Ababa University (40.59%), and Bahir Dar University (14.85%). Authors affiliated from Adama University also shared the high rejection rate as compared to others domestic institutions (5.94%).

Editorial processes in which EJE manuscripts are rejected mostly

As far as editorial policy of EJE is concerned (IER, 2011), manuscripts are rejected if they are not likely to meet the editorial criteria of the Journal. In doing so, manuscripts are often preliminarily reviewed by editors. Editors reject promptly those manuscripts that do not meet the initial evaluation. Manuscripts judged to be of potential interest to the editors' readership are sent for formal review to two peer reviewers. Those manuscripts negatively assessed by both of the reviewers were rejected after the Editorial Board going through the comments. Manuscripts are also rejected if authors fail to address assessors' comments or to respond timely to the Board.

An effort has been made to look into in which editorial process the EJE manuscripts were rejected mostly in the study years. As shown in Table 2 underneath, 41.58% of the manuscripts were rejected during internal (initial) evaluation, and 38.61% of them were rejected during peer reviewing. Moreover, 19.80% of the manuscripts were unacceptable for publication after passing either the initial and/or major peer review.

Reasons for rejecting manuscripts of EJE

Manuscripts submitted for peer review scholarly publications may be rejected for a number of different reasons, most of which are avoidable. Manuscripts with weak contribution and relevance to the field, or inappropriate to the journal's audience, or manuscripts with weak study design are often exposed to rejection. Manuscripts may not also be accepted for publication due to unfair decision of editors and/or reviewers. What is more, some manuscripts may not warrant publication as a result of conflicts of interests that might arise between authors and editors. On top, authors are other bodies who can foster for the rejection manuscripts submitted for considering publication.

Table 1. Institutional affiliation of authors of the rejected manuscripts.

S/N	Institutions	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total (%)
1	Addis Ababa University	1	9	9	7	6	9	41(40.59)
2	Bahir Dar University	1	2	6	3	1	2	15(14.85)
3	Adama University	—	1	3	—	2	—	6(5.94)
4	Assela Teachers College	—	—	1	1	—	3	5(4.95)
5	Civil Service University	—	—	1	—	2	1	4(3.96)
6	Mekelle University	—	—	—	—	1	2	3(2.08)
7	Wollo University	—	—	—	—	1	2	3(2.08)
8	Delta State University, Nigeria	—	1	2	—	—	—	3(6.25)
9	University of Akoka Yaba, Nigeria	1	—	—	—	—	1	2(1.98)
10	Gondar University	—	1	—	1	—	—	2(1.98)
11	Dilla University	—	1	—	1	—	—	2(1.98)
12	Bonga Teachers College	—	—	1	1	—	—	2(1.98)
13	Higher Education Relevance and Assurance Agency	2	—	—	—	—	—	2(1.98)
14	Hawassa University	—	—	—	—	—	2	2(1.98)
15	Addis Ababa Science and Technology University	—	—	—	—	1	1	2(1.98)
16	Hossana Teachers College	—	1	—	—	—	—	1(0.99)
17	University of Zimbabwe	1	—	—	—	—	—	1(0.99)
18	Mulugushi University, Zambia	—	—	1	—	—	—	1(0.99)
19	Queens College, USA	—	1	—	—	—	—	1(0.99)
20	Center for Development Research, Germany	—	—	1	—	—	—	1(0.99)
21	Kotebe University College	—	—	—	—	—	1	1(0.99)
22	Samuel Adegboyega University, Nigeria	—	—	—	—	—	1	1(0.99)
Total		6	17	25	14	14	25	101(100)

Values in parentheses are percentages.

Table 2. Rejected manuscripts of EJE in the years 2008 to 2013.

S/N	Description	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total (%)
1	Rejected during preliminary assessment	3	—	12	6	2	19	42(41.58)
2	Rejected during peer-review assessment	3	12	7	4	8	5	39(38.61)
3	Others(rejected due to various reasons after passing either the preliminary and/or peer assessment)	—	5	6	4	4	1	20(19.80)
Total		6	17	25	14	14	25	101(100)

Values in parentheses are percentages.

Many editors rejected manuscripts for the merits and validity of scientific knowledge exchange, and the quality of their publications. In so doing, editors have been authorized to make decisions about the acceptance or rejection of manuscripts. To make equitable decision, editors often set editorial policy and evaluation criteria for reviewing manuscripts. Based on the criteria, editors request reviewers to assess submitted manuscripts, and accept or reject manuscripts as per reviewers' comments.

All manuscripts submitted for publication in EJE pass through preliminary assessment by the editorial staff using 6 criteria (whether or not the content of the paper is

in the area of education and related field; the paper is not more than 30 pages; style and format of the article follows EJE's guidelines; the methods, techniques, procedures and instruments used to collect the data are reliable, and have been adequately described; and the data analyzed clearly and adequately). To save time for authors and peer-reviewers, only those manuscripts that seem most likely to meet the criteria are sent for formal review. If not, they are rejected without external review.

As was said, manuscripts judged to be of potential interest to the editors' readership are sent to two reviewers for formal review using 10 criteria. The Editorial

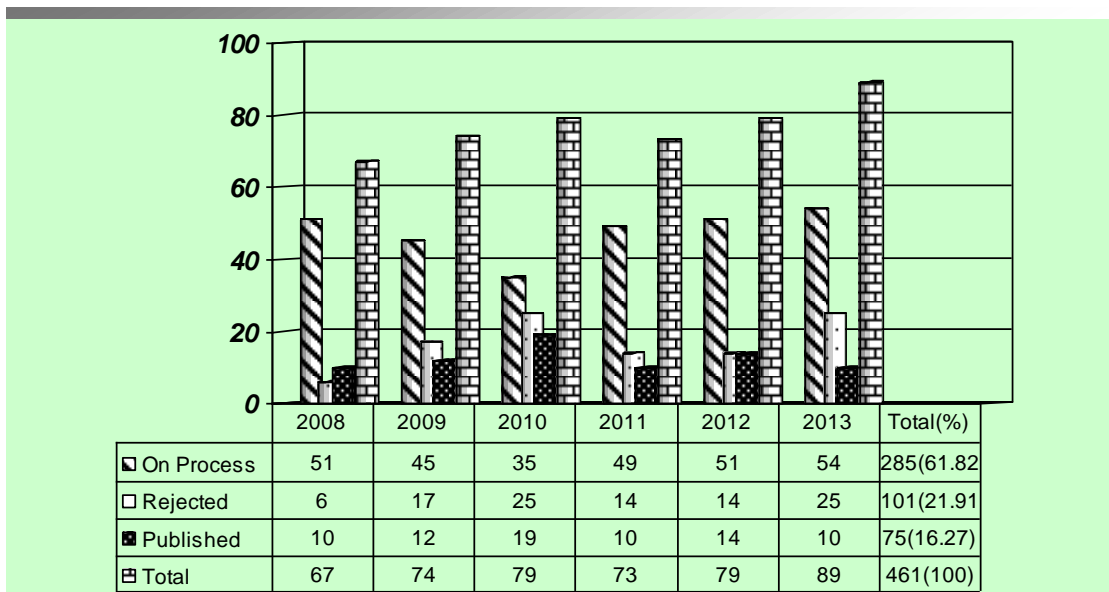


Figure 1. On Process, Published and Rejected Manuscripts of EJE in the years 2008 to 2013 (*Some manuscripts were submitted for publication prior to the year 2008). Source: The Managing Editor's Manuscripts Follow-up Sheet.

Board then makes a decision based on the reviewers' comments and suggestions. If both peer reviewers positively assessed the manuscript, the Board sends it to the author for revision. In cases where one reviewer alone opposes publication, the manuscript is sent to a third reviewer to resolve disputes. If a manuscript negatively assessed by two assessors, the manuscript is rejected outright.

During the study, attempts were made to examine major reasons for rejecting manuscripts of EJE. The results of reasons given by the reviewers (preliminary and peer) for rejecting manuscripts are presented in Figures 2 and 3 according to their assessment criteria categories.

As illustrated in Figure 1, most of EJE's preliminarily assessed manuscripts were rejected due to employing inappropriate research methods (53.57%). Moreover, 39.29% of them were rejected as result of style and format of the manuscript, since the manuscript did not follow the styles and formats the journal's demands. Very few of manuscripts (7.14%) were rejected because of weakness of the content of the manuscripts.

Preliminarily assessors' comments also indicated that most of the manuscripts were unacceptable for further assessment (did not merit peer review) as a result of inappropriate research methods, and since the style and format of the manuscript did not follow the guidelines of EJE. For example, the assessors commented as:

...The methods, techniques procedures and instruments

used to collect the data are not clear...I have several questions with regard to the methods used. To be fair, I want these to be presented to the Board and let the Board members decided either to reject the manuscript or to proceed with the review process.... In my observation, nothing has been done to collect data of any sort to be taken as part of the material. In view of this, therefore, I believe this material does not merit to be considered an article at any stage. ... I have a strong reservation on the contents, methods, title and conclusions. [It is] more of a propaganda than serious academic work. ... It is only a literature review. It does not have a methodology section, data analysis or empirical findings. Hence, I suggest that it should be returned to the author... The article does not incorporate components of research the problem, methods, analysis, etc. The Board can give its judgment before it is sent to assessors. ...The article does not fulfill most of the requirements of EJE to be sent to assessors...

NB: The dots denote that comments were extracted from different assessors

As was discussed, EJE's manuscripts were also rejected during peer reviewing. Comments of peer reviewers categorized and tallied according to the criteria of assessing EJE manuscripts in order to see major reasons of peer-reviewers' rejection. The following results were

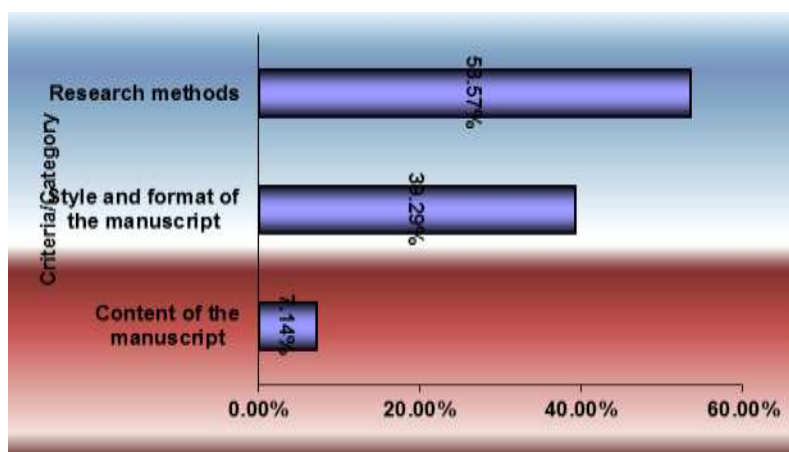


Figure 2. Reasons given by preliminary reviewers when recommending rejection of manuscripts submitted for publication in EJE.

obtained.

Figure 3 shows that inappropriate data analysis and presentation, inadequacy of data to justify the conclusions reached by the author, inappropriate use of research method, insufficient literature review, incongruence between the title and content of the study and insignificant of content of the study (worthy of investigation) were the principal reasons for the rejection of EJE manuscripts.

Peer reviewers also forwarded the following remarks and comments when they recommend rejection. A reviewer commented, "The article seems to me that it is simply a senior essay, which is mainly based on insufficient literature review, poor description of the methodology section, shallow analysis of data and tenuous conclusions." Another assessor remarked that the manuscript he/she assessed could have been rejected at the preliminary assessment phase since the paper was full of slogans and catchphrases; it did not look like a scholarly academic paper. In relation to the worthiness of the investigation, an assessor commented, "The content of the study is not worthy of investigation. It is of neither practical nor theoretical value. It may serve as only feed-back to the concerned body in one of the government colleges in Addis Ababa." A reviewer outlined, "The article does not fulfill the criteria outlined by EJE. In fact, it has handicaps that cannot be improved due to error related to the methodology..." Comments of another reviewer read as, "This paper is not publishable in EJE for the following reasons. The format employed in EJE was not adequately followed; review of related literature was not made; no proper data were available; there was little discussion; and the conclusion seems not exhaustive."

The foregoing peer reviewers' comments indicate that poor data presentations and analysis, inappropriate

research methods, inadequacy of data and insufficient literature reviews are the major reasons for rejection of EJE manuscripts during the major assessment.

As far as the publication traditions of EJE are concerned, manuscripts are also rejected after they qualify the initial and/or major review. As illustrated in Figure 4 beneath, most of the manuscripts were rejected due to the authors did not address the reviewers' suggestions timely (45.45%), and out-dated data (36.36%).

Concerning the rejection of manuscripts after meeting assessors' comments, rejection letters written to authors to notify the reasons for the rejection of their work was looked into. For example, the content of a rejection letters as result of authors' failure to respond for revised version read as:

...Though the Board requested you to attend all the comments and submit the revised copy of your manuscript as per the comments of the reviewers, you have not responded for a long time. For this reason, on its meeting dated July 15, 2010, the Editorial Board has found your manuscript not to be publishable in EJE and decided that a letter be sent to you to take note of this...

Another rejection letter due to out-dated data states:

... the Board has been making all the necessary efforts to process your manuscript for publication, it has been sent to six assessors. However, as many of the assessors did not show interest in the area and data are outdated, on its meeting dated October 22, 2010, the Board agreed to stop processing your manuscript and decided that a letter be sent to you to take note of this.

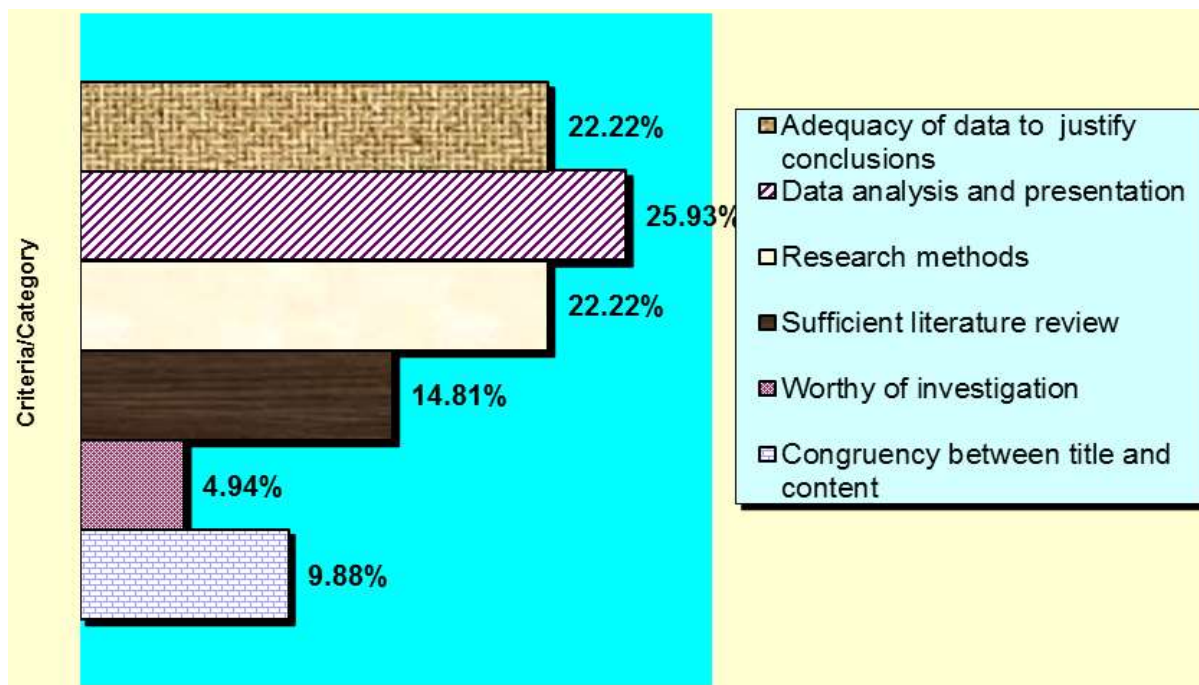


Figure 3. Reasons given by peer reviewers when recommending rejection of manuscripts submitted for publication in EJE.

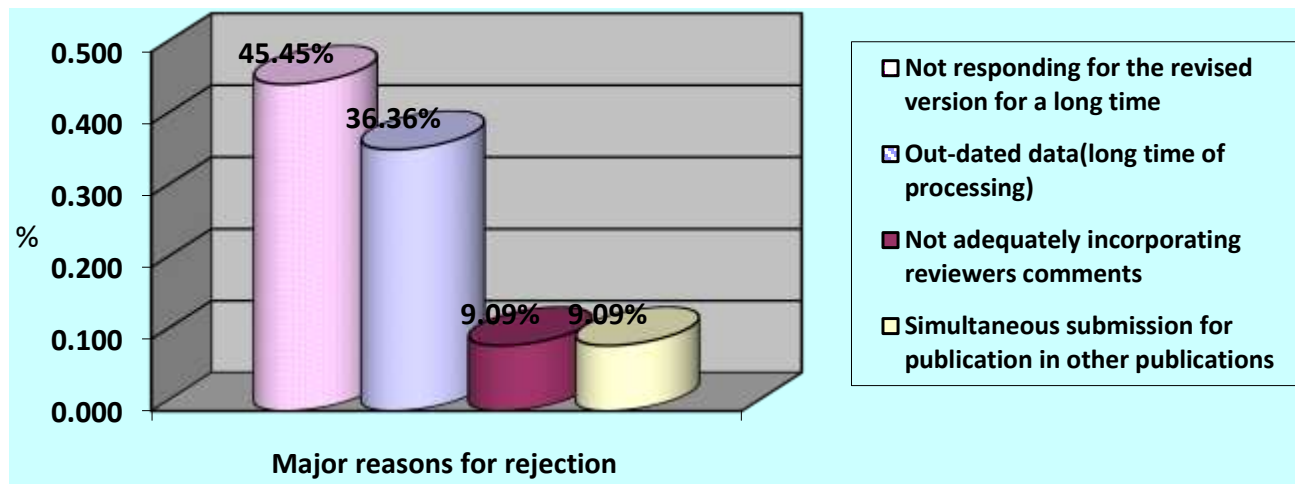


Figure 4. Reasons for rejection of manuscripts after meeting either the preliminary or peer review process.

Types of manuscripts often exposed to rejection

As stated in EJE guidelines, the Ethiopian Journal of Education seeks to publish scholarly articles based on work in education and related areas. EJE publishes original empirical studies, literature reviews, theoretical articles, methodological articles, book reviews, dissertation and thesis abstracts, synopsis of major

research, short communications, commentaries (comments on articles published in the Journal), and other relevant issues in the area of education. Manuscripts to be published in EJE should satisfy the quality and standard required by a reputable journal (IER, 2011).

The guidelines also identify the types of contribution to EJE are peer-reviewed: original empirical studies,

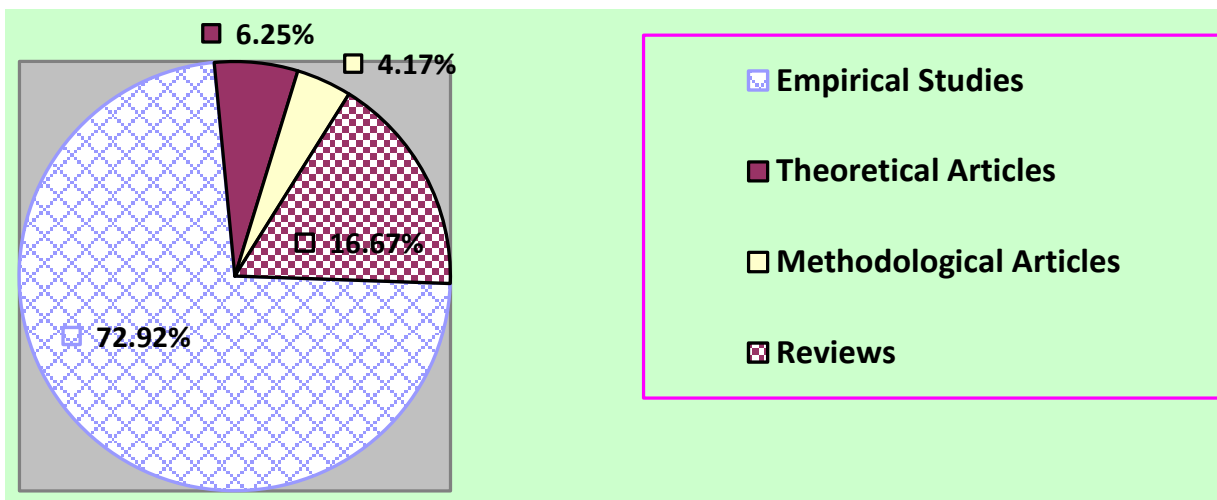


Figure 5. Types of manuscripts often rejected.

literature reviews, theoretical articles, methodological articles. Other contributed manuscripts (dissertation and thesis abstracts, synopsis of major research works, short communications, book reviews and commentaries) are not usually peer-reviewed. Nevertheless, such manuscripts are assessed by editors to determine appropriateness for the Journal and any improvements that could be made. Or articles published in these sections, particularly if they present technical information, may be peer-reviewed at the discretion of the Editorial Board. The data in relation to types of peer reviewed manuscripts often rejected are given in a pie chart (Figure 5).

The pie chart shows that the highest numbers of rejected manuscripts of EJE were reports of full-fledged articles, empirical studies (72.92%). Moreover, review works, literature review, were the other types of manuscripts EJE often rejected (16.67%). Only few theoretical manuscripts (manuscripts authors draw on existing research literature to advance theory) and methodological manuscripts (manuscripts present new methodological approaches, modifications of existing methods, and the like) were rejected.

Nature of comments recommending rejection

The primary purpose of peer review is to provide the editors with the information needed to determine if a manuscript meets the standards to be published in an academic journal. The review should also instruct the authors on how they can strengthen their manuscript to the point where it may be acceptable. As far as scholarly publications are concerned, a negative review should explain to the authors the weaknesses of their

manuscript, so that rejected manuscripts can understand the basis for the decision and see in broad terms what needs to be done to improve the manuscript for publication elsewhere. It is expected that reviewers' comments forward constructive advice to authors in order to show authors the weaknesses of their work, and teach them from their own mistakes. In scholarly commenting, offensive criticisms which hammer one's effort are not expected. For this reason, editors of scholarly journals encourage reviewers to avoid statements that may cause needless offence. Reviewers are strongly encouraged to state modestly their opinion of a manuscript.

Even though this is the fact, offensive comments are not uncommon in double-blind review tradition. As far as experiences are concerned, some EJE assessors wrote comments that may cause needless offence when they believe a manuscript would not be suitable for publication though many of the assessors spelt out concise comments which enable the author to understand the reason for the decision. Bearing this in mind, efforts were made to examine reviewers' comments on randomly selected rejected manuscripts.

Many of the comments explain the weakness of rejected manuscripts. For example, a reviewer spelt out, "...Generally, my verdict of the publishability of the article is that it is not up to the standard of quantitative and/or qualitative research and not publishable." Another assessor also commented that: "Finally, the assessor feels that this article has considerable methodological and conceptual limitations, which make it very difficult to consider for publication in EJE." Some of the reviewers suggested improvements as:

This paper cannot be published as a research article in EJE in its present form. However, if significant

improvement and reworking is made, I recommend its publication as a communication article since the issue is timely....If the writer can discard the questionnaire because it is dubious and represents a violation of research procedures, and make rigorous revision as suggested, the paper may be salvaged.... To be very modest, I would like to advise the authors to rewrite the paper as per the recommended format and content, if they have the data, and re-submit it to the Journal for consideration for publication.

NB: The dots denote that comments were extracted from different assessors

Very few of the peer reviewers outlined comments on language issues when they report manuscripts were not qualified for publication. A comment, for instance, indicates, "The most serious concern I have is the poor writing quality of the paper, which considerably lacks in grammatical construction, coherent flow of ideas and logical argumentation..." Similarly, an assessor forwarded, "The writer needs to use standard language of research, as it stands, the research seems to lack standard research term. Yet, his/her research could represent a modest description of the present state of affairs regarding..."

Although many of the reviewers stated constructive comments for the reasons they rejected EJE manuscripts, few of the reviewers' comments were destructive, they wrote offensive comments such as:

In the first case the author should not have submitted such a composition for publication in the Journal. I request the Editorial Board not to waste the time of their readers by sending such things for assessment.... Going through the material, I discovered that it is not prepared as an article in the true sense of the word I know of an article...

What is more, it is noted from reviewers comments that some reviewers remarked vague comments in rejecting manuscripts. That is, they negatively reviewed manuscripts as per the assessment criteria. However, instead of explicitly reporting to the editors that as to the rejection of the manuscript, they spelt out general or vague comments, such as, "...the paper may be considered for publication though it has the aforementioned weaknesses"; 'going through the above drawbacks, the Editorial Board may consider the paper for publication'; '... this paper leaves much to be desired to be published in EJE'."

From the aforementioned comments, it can be said that the nature of comments reviewers remarked when recommending rejection are different in kind. Most of the comments indicate weakness of the manuscript and reject the manuscript outright. Some of them rejected the

manuscript, but indicated to the authors that further work might justify a resubmission. Few of the assessors suggested unconstructive and vague comments and suggestions.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that authors took the lion's share of EJE manuscripts rejection. The reasons for rejecting EJE manuscripts have been found to be closely linked with the authors' ways of reporting their research outputs, and will of addressing the reviewers' comments satisfactorily. Editors also contributed the rejection of EJE manuscripts in the way that employing long process of the submitted manuscripts. Moreover, some of the reasons for rejection of manuscripts were tolerable and correctable with a closer communication with authors. Editors seem fail to do that.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study the following recommendations are suggested:

- i) Most of the reasons for EJE's manuscripts are avoidable and can easily be resolved. Therefore, editors must give a room for authors to re-organize their manuscript to address specific concerns instead of entirely rejecting manuscripts. Based on the manuscripts' contribution and relevance to the field, reviewers should also indicate to authors the weaknesses of their works and recommend resubmission instead of rejecting outright.
- ii) A web site should be created for EJE and the editorial policies of the journal must be posted to up lift the awareness of contributors on EJE's in house styles and formats.
- iii) The Institute of Educational Research, which hosted the Journal, has to raise the awareness of authors, editors and assessors on the bases of find of the study.
- iv) This study is only dealt with analysis of EJE's manuscript rejections. Other factors, such as conflicts of interests that might arise between authors and editors, inadequate man power, long processing of submitted manuscripts and the like are also contributing to the Journal's manuscripts rejections. Therefore, further researches have to be carried out to explore those factors.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

REFERENCES

- Ajao OG (2005). Some Reasons for Manuscript Rejection by Peer-Reviewed Journals. *Annals Ibadan Postgrad. Med.* 3(2):9-12.
- Amare A (1998). The State of Educational Research in IER(1967-1998). *IER Flambeau* 5(2):1-8.
- Bordage G (2001). Reasons reviewers reject and accept manuscripts: the strengths and weaknesses in medical education reports. *Acad. Med.* 76(9):889-896.
- Byrne DW (1998). *Publishing your medical research paper. What they don't teach in medical school.* Baltimore: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Daft RL (n.d.). Why I Recommended That Your Manuscript Be Rejected and What You Can Do About It. Retrieved from pcbfaculty.ou.edu/classfiles/MGT%206973%20Seminar%20in...
- David J, Pierson MD, FAARC (2004). The Top 10 Reasons Why Manuscripts Are Not Accepted for Publication. *Respiratory Care*, 49(10):1246-1252. Retrieved from <http://www.rcjournal.com/contents/10.04/10.04.1246.pdf>
- Ehara S, Takahashi K (2007). Reasons for Rejection of Manuscripts Submitted to AJR by International Authors. *AJR*, 188, W113–W116. Retrieved from http://www.medit-online.com/images/Ehara--reasons_for_MS_rejection.pdf
- IER (2011). *The Ethiopian Journal of Education, Publication Guidelines.* Addis Ababa: AAU Printing Press.
- Ligthelm AA, Koekemoer EM (2009). Academic publishing: Lessons learnt from the Southern African Business Review. *Southern Afr. Bus. Rev.* 13(3):28-50.
- Lüttge U (2011). *Publishing Journals and Books.* A power point presentation at a workshop on 'Standardization of Ethiopian Scientific Journals and Books', March 14-17, 2011. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Peat J (2002). *Scientific Writing Easy when you Know How.* London: BMJ Books. [electronic version]
- Tesfay S (2011). Educational Research and the Ethiopian Journal of Education (EJE) in the Past Decade (2000-2009): Contributions, Downsides, and the Way Forward. *Ethiop. J. Educ.* 31(2):107-143.