

Editorial

Improving Manuscript Quality through Rigorous Editorial Process

“Change is not made without inconvenience, even from worse to better” (Richard Hooker). One example that clearly depicts worse to better change is the transformation of caterpillar to butterfly. Researchers about butterfly noted that the graceful butterflies we observe poised on the flower have experienced some rapid and dramatic changes in form—complete metamorphosis (Jabar, 2012). Applying this metaphor to research manuscripts submitted for possible publication to the Ethiopian Journal of Social Sciences and Language Studies (EJSSLS), before reaching the stage of publication, they pass through rigorous review and editorial process. However, some authors complain against this painstaking editorial endeavor. A complaint from one experienced author who repeatedly received comments to improve his/her manuscript reads:

Before I proceed with making more alternations to it – I will be most grateful for a clear indication whether your Journal is interested in publishing my text. For, it seems to me, that it will be reviewed endlessly and, of course, the view of each of the reviewers will be different, and... (12 July 2015, Europe).

Our rigorous review and editorial process is only to enhance the quality of publications: to bring comprehensive reporting to critical readers and to communicate clearly, and neither to hurt nor to prioritize the interest of authors. In their abstract, Goodmann et al. (1994) read: “Peer review and editing improve the quality of ... research reporting, particularly in those areas that readers rely on most heavily to decide on the importance and generalizability of the findings”. Similar suggestion comes from Schriger (2012, p. 2): “Peer review’s purpose is to bring readers complete presentations that meet the methodological standards and standards for comprehensive reporting. Don’t worry whether the authors have found truth, worry about whether they have told a complete story”. According to Cooper et al. (2003), peer review and editing should improve communication.

Poorly reviewed and edited manuscripts are less read and cited. The editors of EJSSLS do not believe that all, but only a few, published manuscripts are worth reading or beneficial: bring readers complete information and communicate clearly. According to the review of Lock (1994), among the articles published on a particular topic, only 10% to 15% are beneficial. And Library use studies have uncovered that half the journals on the shelves are never looked at. And we do not want our journal to be listed among these.

Editors of the Annals of Emergency Medicine (e.g. Schriger, 2012, p.2) recognized bias as the fatal threat to the veracity of the work being published. Peter and Ceci (n.d) (cited in Lock, 1994) also suspected that less qualified manuscripts but written by top people from top institutions are reviewed and edited by biased reviewers and editors for reasons such as improving status. To establish their suspicion on empirical data, Peters and Cec disguised and resubmitted such manuscripts to journals that had

originally published them, largely unrecognized. The result was that the majority of them were rejected based on scientific bases. Unlike to such biased editors, the editor in-chief of the EJSSLS bet that majority of the journal's editors are critical. We do not "collect rent". We have rejected or delayed incompetent manuscripts which are submitted by colleague including editorial board members as well as the international board members of the journal. As indicated in the previous Editorial (Vol.1, Issue 2), we are dedicated to publish manuscripts that benefit society: yes manuscripts which can be viewed, downloaded, read and cited frequently.

Biased reviewers and editors are less concerned about their audience:critical readers. Schriger (2012) recommends reviewers and editors to check whether the research manuscripts are appropriate to their readers, report the science [methodology] completely and correctly, provide all of the information that a knowledgeable and critical reader needs to reach a conclusion about the work. Hence, the editors of EJSSLS strongly respect this advice.

Although our editorial process is painful to both authors and editors, by the end of the day it rewards both parties. From Addis Ababa University, an experienced (corresponding) author, an associate professor, who has published many manuscripts both in local and international reputable journals said:

I thank you very much for your serious engagement in improving the quality of our articles. Honestly, the quality of our articles at submission has been tremendously improved and, hence, it may not be fair to attribute the quality only to our making. It can be a tiresome job to you but it ultimately pays back. I have been publishing in many local and international reputable journals so far; but to be honest I see genuine commitments to quality here. If you continue with this effort your journal will shortly become much sought than many here in our country. (29 July 2015)

There is a grain of truth in this encouraging comment. Among authors who published manuscripts in our journal, some of them have submitted another manuscripts learning that the painstaking reviewing and editing process later on pays back.

The editors are also paid back knowing that manuscripts from their publications are frequently being downloaded. According to the ResearchGate (2015), during the past one year, among the publications of the journal, the publications of one author have been downloaded 100 times in different countries such as United States of America, Canada, Netherland, Kenya, South Africa, Ethiopia, Tanzania, China, India and some other Asian and African countries. The editors hope that these downloads will be cited. The congratulations from the ResearchGate reads: "Congratulations [name of the author] you reached a milston! [milestone]" (22July 2015). Other evidences that show our journal has started winning the minds and hearts of readers are given on the editorial of Volume1, Issue 2 of the Journal.

The professor complained at the onset against the rigorous editorial process, after feeling defects in his/her manuscript that need further improvement, wrote to the editor:

Thank you for your email. Due to my busy schedule in the next three-four months, I would be grateful if you were kind enough to inform me about your Editorial Board's decision regarding my article. If there is any work still to be done, I would wish to get on with it as soon as possible.

The editors strongly believe that rigorous review and editorial process would transform manuscripts at caterpillar stage to that of butterfly, but not to perfection. The five manuscripts in this issue also have passed through strong review and editorial process as witnessed by their respective authors. Yet, we never bet that our published manuscripts are perfect. Still they could be subjected to defect. The editors also believe that they have to always enhance their editorial skills as the quality of reviewers and editors improves the quality of manuscripts (Goodman et al., 1994; Goodman et al., 1998; Schriger et al., 2002; Day FC, 2002). We conclude echoing Schriger (2012, p. 3): "By refocusing peer review on the paper's methodology...and on the quality of the reporting of the science, editors can improve the quality of research in their journals".

Finally, we invite you dear readers not only to read these manuscripts but also to send us your comments and research papers for possible publication. Bon reading!

The editor,
Tesfaye Gebeyehu.

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