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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Challenges Faced by Arab Peer-Reviewers

Prof. Reima Al-Jarf
Full Professor of English and Translation Studies, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Corresponding Author: Prof. Reima Al-Jarf, **E-mail**: reima.al.jarf@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

This study attempted to find out the challenges that Arab peer-reviewers face in reviewing journal articles, the time given for finishing the review, following up the reviewers, the evaluation criteria, decision-making, accepting and rejecting articles, and pressures imposed on the reviewers. Forty Arab peer reviewers responded to a survey with open-ended questions. The responses were sorted out and classified according to 10 categories. The most common problems facing reviewers can be summarized as follows: papers sent for review have linguistic and methodological weaknesses. The evaluation standards/benchmarks vary from one periodical to another and from one institution to another. The reviewers vary in efficiency experience, caliber, and meticulousness. The majority of reviewers are lenient and have an inadequate background in their field. The amount of time taken in the review and publishing process is long. Some journals do not state clearly the reviewing and publishing policies, do not have an evaluation form, do not mention the characteristics and percentage of accepted research articles to authors, reviewers, and the public, the areas of specializations covered by the journal, and have a limited number of specialized and qualified reviewers. Some recommendations for overcoming those challenges are given.

| KEYWORDS

Reviewing challenges, peer-reviewers, peer-reviewing, peer-reviewing process, review procedures, journal articles, journal reviewers, editorial board, editor-in-chief.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The peer-reviewing process of scientific research emerged in the mid-twentieth century. For example, Einstein's research, which he called "Annus Mirabilis" was published in the 1905 issue of the journal *Annalen der Physik*, and was not subject to peer-reviewing. No one reviewed it except the journal's editor-in-chief, Max Planck, the father of the Quantum Theory, and his assistant, Wilhelm Wien. Although they were colleagues and had won the Nobel Prize, a panel of reviewers was not formed, as it is the case in many peer-reviewed scientific journals[1]. The Philosophical Transactions issued by the Royal Society is considered the first journal to officially endorse peer-reviewing (Zuckerman & Merton, 1971). Now, the peer-reviewer is in the heart of the scientific publishing process. In a study by McKnight and Price (1999), 94% of the respondents reported that peer reviewing is important in print journals. Results of survey studies conducted by the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP) (2002; 1999) and a study by Rowland (1982) showed that 81% of authors and 80% of readers still consider peer reviewing important. Faculty members believe that peer-reviewed research is of great importance for promotion (Speier, Palmer, Wren & Hahn, 1999). A study by the British Research Councils (2006) found that 93% of university researchers believe that peer-reviewing is important and has a central role in academic life, and they view it with appreciation. Despite this appreciation, peer reviewing is not free of errors and weaknesses. It is difficult to find qualified peer reviewers. The most talented reviewers are always busy with review activities for research councils.

[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peer_review

It is noteworthy to say that the works submitted for peer review go through several important stages before being sent for publication. In this regard, Schwier (1994) traced the process of research submitted for publication in the Canadian Journal of Educational Communication - which is published three times a year - from the moment of initial screening of incoming research to the review by the editorial board, the selection of peer reviewers for it, subjecting it to peer reviewing, returning it to the researcher for making corrections and revisions, and then the final checking. He stated that the advantages of these procedures are providing useful and vital comments to the researcher, screening the submitted research and selecting the best ones for publication. It is also an appropriate procedure of screening in the case of evaluation for promotion, setting professional standards for research and specialization, and reducing costs. Peer reviewing is a requirement for publishing in scientific journals and for obtaining financial support for research or study from some party. Hence, having others look at the work would identify areas of weakness in it. They provide suggestions for improving it and prevent the publication of low quality research that does not meet the standards of good scientific research in a particular area of specialty. Peer reviewing is also a means of selecting a small number of research papers or research projects when funding sources are limited, and when the number of published articles in a journal or pages of a journal are limited.

Since peer reviewers are chosen from experts in the field of research papers submitted for peer review, the peer reviewing process is necessary for establishing a broad and solid base of knowledge and scientific research that can be relied upon. Scientists who read published research may be experts in a highly specialized field, so they rely on the peer review process to provide reliable research on which they can build subsequent research related to their area of specialization.

The Research Councils UK (2005; 2006A; 2006B) relies on peer reviewing to give constructive comments and interpret the reviewers' opinions and scores that they send to the authors of research articles. Therefore, it is important for the reviewers to give feedback that helps the researchers. Peer reviewers rarely receive any reward or return for the peer reviewing process. It is an activity without a name. Some journals publish a list of the names of their reviewers, but the reviewers do not receive any recognition for their efforts from the public.

The Research Councils in Britain 2006 report stated that the power of peer reviewing is evident in the ability to improve the quality of the submitted research projects. The reviewers may draw the applicant's attention to the research being conducted elsewhere and provide ideas for improving the research methodology. Participation in peer reviewing is beneficial for the reviewers themselves, as they cultivate their reviewing skills and acquire new ideas. Peer reviewing is a competitive system. This competition makes the submitted research of high quality. Applicants will be highly motivated to submit cutting-edge research projects. On the other hand, the strength of competition and the selection process help ensure the quality of the projects selected for financing.

In addition, Mulligan (2004) found that peer reviewing leads to the personal and professional development of the reviewer and the author of the work under review. The reviewers do not consider incentives essential, but they do not mind such incentives. They suggested giving the reviewers discounts on books and printer ink. What attests to the importance of peer reviewing is that scientific hypotheses presented to the world are ignored by the majority of scholars unless they are published in peer-reviewed scholarly journals.

Although peer reviewing is important for both authors and readers, review procedures have some drawbacks and problems that have been subject to extensive studies in the biomedical field. There is a regular series of international conferences on practical peer reviewing in the biomedical sciences that are reported in special issues of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) (1990, 1996, 1998).

Despite the abundance of foreign research, reports, and conferences that revolve around the problems of peer review, grant research, journal research, etc. Arabic research in this field is almost non-existent. The researcher searched the databases of the King Fahd Library, the King Abdulaziz Public Library, the library of the Arab Education Bureau for the Gulf States, and Google, and did not find any Arabic research on the problems facing Arab peer reviewers. Therefore, this study aims to identify the problems and challenges faced by peer reviewers in reviewing journal articles, abstracts, papers submitted to conferences, papers submitted for promotion and research centers, grant research projects, books submitted for publication, textbooks, and translated works. It also aims to identify the causes of these problems and challenges and provide some recommendations for improving the peer review process in local academic institutions, benefiting from international experiences, and raising the level of quality in peer reviewing and in locally published research.

2. Significance of Study

As peer reviewing is a means of decision-making, diagnosing the difficulties that peer reviewers face, results of the current study will help establish controls to overcome these difficulties. It will help raise the degree of objectivity and transparency in research

peer review, raising the quality of research published locally, and prove suggestions for improving the peer review process in local academic institutions.

3. Definition of terms

Peer reviewing[2] is the process of subjecting an author's scientific work, research, or ideas to examination by others who are experts in the same field. Editors and funding institutions use peer review primarily to select and examine papers and studies submitted by authors in order to decide whether to award a grant or not. The peer review process aims to make authors meet the standards of specialization. Specialists and scholars in various fields view unreviewed research with suspicion. Even peer-reviewed journals may contain flaws despite peer reviewing.

The Elsevier[3] Publishing Company defined peer reviewing as the process of involving experts in a particular specialty in reading and commenting on new research in order to verify and confirm its validity. Peer reviewing in some fields is the dividing line between judging what is scientific and what is speculation. It sorts out the submitted articles and asks the authors to meet the standards of their specialization and achieve scientific objectivity.

Until a study is published in a peer-reviewed journal, the researcher submits his research paper to the journal. If the journal editor believes that the research falls within the objectives and scope of the journal, the research paper is sent to peer reviewers, who are qualified and independent experts, and who conduct and publish research in the same specialty, to evaluate the research paper in terms of originality, significance, credibility and clarity.

The percentage of research accepted for publication varies from one journal to another. Some journals accept a higher percentage of research than their counterparts. This depends on several factors, such as the budget, the number of issues issued per year, and others. Low acceptance rates indicate that the journal is favored by authors and receives a large number of papers. As for journals that have higher rates of accepted research, they receive a smaller number of research and thus focus on the necessity of publishing. The average percentage of accepted research is between 25%-50%. In a survey of the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP) (2001) in cooperation with the European Society of Editors, it was found that the majority of editors reviewed one journal, and three-quarters of the sample of selected journals reviewed all the papers submitted to them. The number of studies that journals receive ranges between 100-500, the percentage of accepted research ranges between 25%-50%, and 40% of journals use peer reviewing without mentioning the names of authors and reviewers, while 80% of the journals hide the names of the reviewers, and half of them correspond with the reviewers by e-mail.

4. Literature Review

A review of the literature has revealed a number of studies that defined the characteristics of good peer reviewing. The 2006 Research Councils in Britain report stated that peer reviewing should be transparent, clear, and available to the public, and that all approved research projects should be treated similarly. The council should be able to explain how a specific decision was reached regarding a specific research study, and who reviewed that study. The peer reviewing system should have few restrictions to give researchers the opportunity to elaborate their ideas and give them sufficient time to conduct research. The council should give researchers the freedom to respond to emerging trends and fields. The strengths of peer reviewing are evident in the ability to improve the quality of submitted research projects. The reviewers may draw the applicant's attention to ongoing research elsewhere and provide ideas for improving the research methodology. The reviewers also enhance their skills and gain new ideas.

On the other hand, a number of studies limited the problems faced by reviewers such as the report of the Stanford Academic Council Committee on Libraries (1999), which consists of 6 members, stated that the addition of new periodicals, and edited volumes and conference proceedings show that peer reviewing standards have diminished in role and are in jeopardy.
In a survey of the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP) (1999), the results demonstrated that 70% of the authors are satisfied or very satisfied with the current peer review process, and 52% face obstacles that prevent them from achieving their publishing goals. Half of the reviewers reported that the number of papers they are asked to review per year is adequate. One in six reported that they were stressed out at work. Reviewers receiving a reward for their reviews is considered an exceptional case. 20% reported that their academic load is so high that receiving a reward for reviewing has become necessary if the journals want to find a sufficient number of reviewers to carry out the review process.

Moreover, the Advisory Committee for Research Councils commissioned Dr. Margaret Boden to prepare a peer review report, published in 1990, called the Boden Report (1990), in which she recommended that peer reviewing be more transparent. She also stated that peer reviewing harmed novice researchers starting their careers, innovative research, and interdisciplinary research. She

[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peer_review

[3] www.elsevier.com/search?query=review+process&page=1&sortBy=relevance

added that there is no alternative to scientific peer reviewing (The British Academy Reports, 2006). In 1995, the Royal Society published a report that focused on peer reviewing for the purpose of distributing Research Council grants. Its findings were similar to the Boden Report, which stated that peer reviewing should be the main factor in the decision-making process regarding scientific support by the scientific community. The peer reviewing process has become more expensive in terms of the time allocated for each research project submitted for grants, increased frustration, and decreased morale among all grant applicants. The Boden report drew attention to three areas in which peer reviewing is ineffective: Evaluating non-radical ideas, evaluating research projects in interdisciplinary fields, and evaluating research submitted by young researchers whose research record is inadequate. Peer reviewing also reveals signs of stress. Although peer reviewing requires significant time commitments, it is open, transparent, fair, and identifies research projects of high quality.

A review of prior studies by Meadows (1998) indicated that the problems of peer review are summarized as follows: bias in the peer review against authors from small institutions or publications, failure to detect false results, plagiarism, or delaying publication until the reviewers publish the results of their own research.

A report by the British Research Councils UK (2005; 2006A; 2006B) mentioned the problem of idea leaking or lack of impartiality of reviewers. Therefore, the council provided a high level of training to reviewers, with regards to research council policies and procedures. The proportion of international reviewers was increased to enhance the degree of impartiality of peer reviewing. It provided a high level of transparency in the peer reviewing procedures by publishing the names of reviewers and providing authors with comments.

The Royal Society in Britain (1995) stated that peer reviewing can discourage researchers from presenting their radical ideas that challenge prevailing ideas, and discourage researchers who have registered a number of research papers in a particular field from entering new fields.

The National Institutes of Health, USA (2006) surveyed 3,247 scientists and found that the percentage of researchers who admitted the plagiarism of their data was 3.3%, the percentage of scientific plagiarism was 1.4%, and 4.7% admitted scientific self-plagiarism where the author publishes scientific material or data from his/her previous works without documentation or reference to their previous works. In some cases, reviewers are unable to obtain raw data, and they misuse internal information, such as using information or data from a study that has not yet been published or using it to obtain personal or professional advantages.

In a study by (Mulligan, 2004), reviewers reported that the peer reviewing load increases with the increase in the number of published research and the decrease in the number of reviewers wishing to review. Authors are now demanding that their works be reviewed quickly more than ever before. The authors believe that bias and professional conflicts are important problems in the peer reviewing process. Editors-in-chief also feel that attracting and retaining reviewers is difficult. Authors are accused of sending the same research to several journals, dividing single research into a number of publishing units. They added that scientific plagiarism has increased. Reviewers referred to the difficulty of understanding the study being reviewed due to its poor style and language, or because the writers are non-native speakers of the language. Such research takes longer to review and the reviewer feels that he/she must reject it or improve it before sending it to the author. Among the disadvantages of peer reviewing is the inability to detect plagiarism, and the failure to guarantee the validity of the results of the research they have reviewed.

Schneider (2006) pointed out that reviewers are human. As a result peer reviewing has drawbacks that include inconsistency and bias against the researcher's gender, ignorance, negligence, and dishonesty.

Further disadvantages of reviewing reported by Schwier (1994) included bias, discouraging research that attempts to explore marginal topics, and slowing down the process of change in the discipline. The slowness of the reviewing process also leads to the failure to publish many research papers, in addition to the high cost of issuing paper copies of journals.

In another study, Williamson (2002) classified the problems of peer review as seen by his sample members as follows: (1) Subjectivity, which is the editor's rejection of the paper without sending it to the reviewers, and the editor's choice of reviewers, (2) Bias, which is discrimination against authors because of nationality, mother tongue, gender, and the university to which they belong. Bias also includes cases where the reviewer and the author are competitors or when they belong to two opposing schools of thought. (3) Exploitation, which means the author publishing a large number of studies from a single paper, or repeat publishing, and deleting or downgrading young authors by old authors who steal the works of those working under them. Exploitation also includes taking over unpublished work sent to them for review. Deliberately delaying the publication of competing research. (4) The reviewer's inability to discover weak points and flaws in the research paper. (5) Fraud and misconduct by authors who invent results, invent data, or claim to be the authors of results that are not their own.

Moreover, Wikipedia[4] mentioned five disadvantages of peer reviewing as follows: (1) The peer review process is slow and takes months and sometimes years before the research goes to the printing press. (2) Bias, where peer reviewers criticize results that contradict their orientations and opinions and tolerate results that agree with them. Research that is consistent with the orientations of the elite finds its way to publication and appears in prestigious journals, while research with revolutionary ideas is not published. (3) Failure of peer reviewing occurs when research is published that contains apparent fundamental errors that reduce the importance of the results. (4) Failure to detect plagiarism. In some cases, forgery did not appear until after the research was published and other researchers attempted to re-apply the same research procedures and failed to do so. (5) Scientific plagiarism.

In Mulligan's (2004) study, some reviewers wished to see the opinions of other reviewers for the same work or the editor-in-chief's final decision on the manuscript they had reviewed. Some feel dissatisfied when they are surprised by the publication of a study that they did not recommend for publication. Some feel that the editor-in-chief does not have authority, as some comments are taken at face value. As an example, some peer reviewers prefer to obtain feedback about their peer reviewing performance at the end of the year. It was also noted that reviewers who received such feedback were more inclined to review for the magazine. Most reviewers view peer reviewing as a burden rather than an enjoyable activity because they receive neither reward, nor recognition for their efforts. One of the problems is professional conflicts between reviewers, especially in specializations in which scientific progress depends on financial support. Reviewers can compete for specific researchers to receive financial support. There are those who delay responding and returning the research they have reviewed until the reviewers themselves complete their research. A further problem is the varying quality of peer reviewers' reports. In some cases, the report is very brief, one sentence only. Others are long, spanning several pages. Few write the study again. Young reviewers need advice and guidance. For many, peer reviewing procedures are often unknown and hidden. Confidence in the peer reviewing system requires understanding the peer reviewing system and establishing a transparent framework for process.

A number of suggestions to improve the review process were given by Williamson (2002) that include open review, where authors know the names of the reviewers. This would lead to fewer abusive reviews, give some appreciation to the reviewers, and prevent the plagiarism of scientific research. Subjectivity, bias, and failure to detect peer reviewing errors can be reduced by training peer reviewers and using a list of criteria rather than letting the reviewer give a report in his own style.

Regarding the level of transparency of reviewing, many journals establish general guidelines to varying degrees. Weller (2002) examined 139 journals and found that 51.8% mentioned the journal's policy towards peer reviewing without mentioning the names of the authors and reviewers. About a third of the journals mentioned the percentage of rejected papers, and 17.3% of the journals provide detailed instructions to the reviewers. Transparency benefits readers, authors, reviewers, and editors, meaning that there is a general trend toward transparency, because of its benefit to the journal's readers and the specialist community. Readers can get an idea about the peer review process and make a judgment on the level of studies published in a journal. Authors can have an idea based on information about where they would like to publish their research. Peer reviewers would have a clear idea of what is expected of them. The editor-in-chief will receive a greater number of reviews, will find a greater number of reviewers willing to review, and will receive fewer inquiries about reviewing.

Charry, Murray-Prior, and Parton (2004) developed a set of instructions and logistical issues in the specialized business peer reviewing process, and a peer reviewing model used by reviewers of the Australian Farm Business and Farming Systems Management Journal - an electronic journal - because authors wishing to publish their work in the journal would like to ensure that: (1) the research submitted to the journal is subject to peer review according to common evaluation criteria; (2) that the reviewers make their decisions based on certain data while making optimal use of their time; (3) the review encourages authors to submit their research to be published in the journal and at the same time hinders other researchers from wanting to publish in the journal.

5. Methodology

5.1 Subjects

A random sample of 40 Arab peer reviewers was selected from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, Iraq and the Gulf States. The sample of peer reviewers included male and female reviewers with experience in peer-reviewing journal articles, conference proposals, research submitted for promotion, research submitted to research centers, grant proposals, books and textbooks submitted for publication, and translated works. The reviewers hold different academic degrees (assistant professor, associate professor and full professor). They sample consists of both male and female reviewers with work, research and reviewing experience between 1 and 20 years. They review articles in local journals and institutions as well as foreign periodicals, vetting international conference proposals, and reviewing books on teaching English by foreign publishers. Their areas of specialty are

[4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peer_review

linguistics, TEFL, translation, education, and business. The problems of peer reviewing will not be classified according to the country, academic rank, years of experience or specialization of the reviewers participating in the study because it is neither important, different reviewers might have similar problems.

5.2 Data Collection and Analysis

To identify the problems and challenges faced by Arab reviewers, the researcher used a survey that consisted of the following open-ended questions: (1) What problems do you face in reviewing journal articles, papers and abstracts submitted to conferences, promotion works, papers submitted to research centers, grant projects, books and textbooks submitted for publication, and/or translated works locally and internationally.

The author sent the survey to the reviewers by e-mail and WhatsApp. Reviewers' responses were collected, sorted and classified into 10 categories derived from prior studies in the literature review: (1) problems in selecting the works submitted for review, (2) correspondence/communication problems; (3) problems in the time allocated for review; (4) problems in the work under review, (5) Problems in reviewing standards; (6) Violation of publishing and promotion standards/ethics; (7) Problems in review decisions, (8) Problems specific to an academic institution/journal; (9) Plagiarism; (10) Problems in recognizing and appreciating the reviewer's efforts.

Results of the analysis will be limited to the problems reported by the sample. Other problems and challenges of peer reviewing that were not mentioned by the participants will not be reported herein. Results of the analysis and classification will be reported qualitatively.

6. Results

Data Analysis revealed that the problems that reviewers face in reviewing journal research, research papers and abstracts submitted to conferences, promotion research papers, research papers submitted to research centers, grant research projects, books submitted for publication, textbooks, and translated works are as follows:

1) **Problems of selecting research articles submitted for review**
   Participants indicated that there is no initial screening of works submitted for review in order to reject poor research and not send it for review. The research article is not within the journal's area of specialty. The editor sends the research article to one reviewer only. The reviewer is asked to evaluate a paper beyond his area of specialty and expertise. Despite the initial screening, the articles submitted for review are weak.

2) **Correspondence and communication problems** such as sending the research article late, i.e., few days before the deadline. The Editor-in Chief does not respond to the reviewer' queries in time or does not respond at all. Sometimes the email which contains the research article is not received by the reviewer or it goes to the spam folder.

3) **Inadequacy of the time allocated for the review**
   The reviewer is given a short time such as 3 days, a week or two weeks to review the article and two months to review a translated book. A maximum of 4 weeks is allocated for the review. Sometimes, the reviewer under pressure and is busy. Some reviewers of high caliber receive constant review requests from some journals despite the reviewer's rejection to review anything. They receive review requests from several journals within a short period of time. They might receive several papers within a short period of time. In some cases, the reviewer receives a research paper for review a few days before the summer holiday.

4) **Problems in research articles under review**
   The research topic is old, or it is a repeat of topics previously researched and published. Some are limited in scope and have no practical benefits. In order for the researcher to receive the research grant, some research projects are unrealistic or a repetition of previous research. The topic of the proposal sent to the conference is far from the general theme and sub-themes of the conference.

   Some research papers have methodological weaknesses. The research methodology is inappropriate for the topic investigated. There are problems in designing the research instruments such as questionnaires and tests. Some authors do not know how to design a questionnaire, so the instrument is either faulty, someone designed it for the author, or the author copied it from another article. Some authors refer to secondary sources instead of primary sources (i.e. quoting from a researcher who cited information from a specific reference instead of referring to the original reference). The research paper or conference proposal contains unnecessary information, and does not cover the aim of the study, research instruments, the sample, statistical analysis, and research results.

Some research papers are of poor quality. They have formatting and organizational problems, many linguistic weaknesses and problems in using the research jargon in English or Arabic. Some research papers are very long and boring.

Some articles have documentation problems. The references are not formatted according to APA or MLA, and fixing and re-formatting references for the author takes time from the reviewer. There are weaknesses in writing foreign references and correcting them is a waste of time for the reviewer. Some authors have problems in writing foreign names in the research paper. When writing the names of authors in the text, all the authors' names should be written in Arabic followed by the publication year of publication, then the same names in English.

In the case of translated works, the translated paragraphs are incomprehensible and are not well written. One feels that he/she is reading English in Arabic script. The translator is not specialized in the field of translated work. Whoever reads the translated work does not understand anything from it due to the lack of clarity of the ideas and information, their incoherence, the many errors in translating the meanings of general words and terms, and the use of transitional phrases and words in a way and in places that hinder understanding, rather than focusing on the parts of the sentence that carry the information. There are many linguistic errors in the Arabic translation, such as errors in prepositions, not starting the Arabic sentences with a verb, using the passive voice, and absence of punctuation marks. The translator has a problem understanding English structures and sentences, does not know the exact equivalents of general words, and does not know Arabic equivalents in a particular area of specialty and in research and research results. Technical terms are translated terms literally. When terms are translated phonetically or strange Arabic equivalents are used, some authors do not explain their meaning in a footnote to help the reader understand it. An Arabic equivalent that does not fit the context is used for English words.

Once a reviewer received research papers for promotion (from an Arab university). although the paper topics were not new, they were all in the same area of specialization, and the researcher is good in his specialty, is familiar with a large amount of research in his specialty, and has the ability to discuss, compare/contrast, choose, and criticize.

5) Problems in review standards

Some journals do not have standards and leave the judgment to the reviewer. Some have inadequate evaluation standards. Each periodical has different standards. Some fail to observe the quality/standards of scientific research in some countries. In some institutions, there are no quality standards for promotion research that determine the excellent level, average level, and below average level. Some reviewers are lenient in reviewing because the researcher pays $5 a page for publication and $50 or more as a publication fee.

6) Violating the rules of publishing and promotion

Some authors send their research papers to two journals/publishers for publication. In evaluating promotion words, a reviewer indicated that he received research papers labeled Econometrics, and after examining them, he found that only one paper had equations and the other papers did not contain any equations and did not belong to econometrics. They are all theoretical and sound like a newspaper article. Another reviewer completed evaluating 4 research papers in the field of Islamic Studies. It is a very general field that includes jurisprudence, hadith, and others. He found that two studies were in the field of Islamic economics and the rest were in governance. That is, the exact specialization of the applicant for promotion is not specified, and the area of specialization of the papers submitted for promotion is not specified. A third participant received a book among the works submitted for promotion that was not peer-reviewed which is a violation of the promotion standards. An applicant for promotion did not attach his master's and doctoral theses with the other research papers submitted for promotion. The research papers sent with the promotion application do not meet the institution's promotion requirements/criteria. A participant reported that among the research submitted for promotion is a research paper written in Arabic and published in India. Some reviewers receive research papers that exceed the length specified by the journal's publication rules.

7) Problems in review decisions

Participants declared that some reviewers are very strict, whereas others are superficial and general and brief in their comments. There are cases of favoritism in review decisions. The reviewer's decision is sometimes not honored by the editor-in-chief and the research article is published despite the reviewer's rejection of it. The author and editor-in-chief do not return the revised paper to the reviewer to check the revisions and corrections. The reviewer's effort and time are wasted if the work is published despite its weakness and the reviewer's recommendations for not publishing the article, and if the paper is conditionally accepted with major revisions but the author does not make the required revisions. A reviewer does not know the results of his/her review, i.e., the results of the review and if the revisions have been made and the article has been

published or not. He/she does not know the opinions of other reviewers at work. There is a discrepancy among the reviewers' views of the same research papers, i.e., one reviewer rejects the paper and another accepts it.

8) Problems with journals and academic institutions

The university Scientific Council asked an applicant for promotion to submit his/her master's and doctoral theses, but he/she did not. Sometimes a book is rejected due to lack of funding for this year. If the reviewer is meticulous, some journals do not send him/her research papers for review. A reviewer is supposed to choose the best research project, although all submitted research projects are weak. Some journals or institutions cannot reject all research articles even if they do not meet the standards. Some conferences accept poor quality proposals because the authors have prestigious positions. Others accept poor quality research as a compliment to stakeholders in order to approve research projects and funding. Research proposals with duplicate topics are accepted. Many of the proposals submitted to a symposium/conference fall in certain themes and few or none in others. A small number of proposals for a symposium or conference are received, in which case reviewers are forced to accept all proposals even though some are of poor quality. Some journals and institutions do not send research papers to a meticulous reviewer and send many research papers to a lenient reviewer. Some journals or conferences do not match the area of specialization of the reviewer and the research paper submitted for reviewing. They do not take into account the academic qualifications and experience of volunteer reviewers. They do not match the academic rank of the researcher and reviewer. A reviewer who is an assistant or associate professor may be asked to evaluate a research paper for an author who is a full professor.

9) The problem of plagiarism

Participants mentioned cases of plagiarism such as choosing a research topic that was investigated by other researchers. Some authors translate the introduction from one language to a research paper written in another language and include it in their research papers. Some copy an instrument from another research paper without documenting it. The researcher copies (imitates) the research of another researcher with slight changes. The title of the doctoral dissertation of an applicant for promotion and the title of a book submitted for publication and promotion are the same. The introduction to a book submitted for promotion resembles the introductions to dissertations and not a typical book introduction. Both the book and the dissertation cover the same time period, which made the reviewer suspect that the book is a translation of the author's doctoral dissertation.

10) Problems of recognizing the reviewer's efforts

Participants gave examples of lack of recognition of a reviewer's effort such as accusing the reviewer of being over-strict and too meticulous. In some cases, accuracy is considered over-strictness. The reviewer does not receive a thank-you letter or a certificate of appreciation. Some journals and institutions do not appreciate the reviewer's effort, time, and suggestions he/she gave to improve the work, especially in the case of reviewing outstanding works. Most reviewers usually review for free, although many journals charge authors a publication fee which is sometimes very high. The reviewer is not given his/her financial dues (royalties) or is paid his/her royalties after a long period of time. The names of the reviewers are not mentioned on the editorial board. Anonymous reviewing deprives the reviewer's of the effort, time, and suggestions he made to improve the work, especially in evaluating distinguished research articles, and if the review and comments given are outstanding. Some authors thank the editor-in-chief for the comments, believing that he/she is the one who reviewed the research article.

7. Discussion

Results of this study revealed problems in selecting research works submitted for review, problems with correspondence/communication between the reviewer and the editor-in-chief, problems with the time allocated for the review, the works submitted for review, reviewing standards, violation of publishing and promotion benchmarks, in applying the review decisions, recognizing the reviewer's efforts and problems related to the academic institution, journal, conference, and plagiarism.

The types of problems revealed by the current study are consistent with the types of problems reported by previous reports and studies in the literature such as Weller (2002), Mulligan (2004), Williamson (2002), Schnider (2006), Schweir (1994), Meadows (1998), Royal society (1995, Research councils UK (2005, 2006A, 2006B), Association of learned and Professional society Publishers (1999) and others.

In addition, the problems that reviewers in the current study have are similar to those found by Al-Jarf (2022) in reviewing M.A. and Ph.D. theses such as rejecting the feedback given by the committee members on the part of the graduate student; the thesis topic is a duplicate of a topic of prior study; linguistic errors; unnecessary redundancy; the presence of unnecessary information; methodological problems; the insufficient time given for reading and reviewing the thesis; the department's failure to adhere to the decision of the external examiner; the college rejects the comments of the external examiner; approval of the thesis despite its weakness; failure to comply with the reviewer's decision on the part of the department; rejecting the decision of the internal and

external examiners even though they only requested revisions; forming a new thesis committee to approve the thesis as it is without revisions; rejecting the thesis based on personal issues; the thesis supervisor does not want the examiners to be precise and meticulous and so on.

Moreover, the weaknesses of the articles submitted to journals for review and publication reported in the current study are consistent with the weaknesses of dissertations of Saudi graduate students who graduated from the USA between 1969-1985. Al-Jarf 1990 found that 92.47% of the theses dealt with traditional topics; 54.53% of the thesis titles contained unnecessary words such as "study...", "analyze...", "research into..." and so on; 24.55% did not include the study variables and did not explain or describe the relationship between them accurately; 15.18% did not specify the scope of the study, such as the study sample or where the study was conducted. The research problem in 31.25% of the theses was either general, not specific, or multifaceted. 16.96% were either inconsistent with the problem, known facts, superficial, unclear, insufficient or did not contain study questions; 50.9% did not mention the type of sample used; 5.36% did not mention the research instrument; 24.2% used a research instrument that was not appropriate for the research problem; 27.2% did not indicate the method used in the statistical analysis; 5.8% did not mention the results; and in 31.25%, the results were not generalizable to the study population.

8. Recommendations

To raise the quality of research articles submitted for publication in terms of format, language, and research methodology, and to accelerate the peer reviewing and publication process, the current study recommends the following:

1) The journal website should contain the reviewing strategies and procedures, the organizational structure of the board of reviewers, the names of the editorial board members, and reviewing guidelines and criteria. It should also provide reviewing models that show the excellent, average, and poor level submitted works, specifications for the research article format for authors, the journal's policy regarding whether all research is sent for review, information about the method of selecting reviewers, the number of reviewers assigned to each research article, the length of the reviewing period, the procedures and standards that are followed in reviewing, evaluating research articles, how the final decision is made, how the reviewers' comments are communicated to the author, how disagreement between the reviewers and authors is resolved, and the percentage of rejected research.

2) Adopting a permanent body of reviewers specialized in the fields covered by the periodical, not less than 30 reviewers, whose names are specified in the journal's editorial board to save time in searching for reviewers for articles submitted for publication.

3) Preliminary screening of submitted research and rejection of weak research to save the reviewers' time and effort. If a sufficient number of reviewers are not available, it is preferable to reject studies that are not well written before sending them to the reviewers.

4) Switching to electronic reviewing to reduce the time required for reviewing and publishing a larger body of research. The authors, reviewers, and editors are communicated by e-mail or journal website, and the articles, evaluation forms, and instructions are sent to the reviewer by e-mail or through the journal website. Electronic corrections should be used; comments and recommendations are submitted electronically; electronic storage and follow-up of research articles; and software for writing and formatting research by authors might be used. The use of an electronic review system can also increase the number of potential reviewers, because it enables reviewers in other countries to participate in the review process.

5) Encouraging authors to revise their research work according to the comments and resubmit it to the journal. As for research papers that suffer from linguistic problems, the author can be referred to a specialized editing and translation service or might send his/her research to a specialist whose mother tongue is the language of the research article, whether it is Arabic or English.

6) Creating databases of specialists in various Arab universities and their qualifications and experience.

7) Creating an online information database for all Arabic periodicals in Arab countries, the number of research papers sent to each of them, and the number of research papers published in each of them annually.

8) Developing a guide for young researchers that provides advice on the process of authoring, publishing, and writing scientific research papers. It can include an overview of scientific publishing, searching for a journal suitable for the author's area of specialty, submitting a good research paper, accelerating the review process, reviewing the doctoral dissertation to publish it in the form of a book or research article in a periodical, and way of publishing books. Various

ways to edit books with multiple authors, the basics of authorship such as illustrations, obtaining permission, reviewing and indexing the work, electronic documents and electronic publishing, ways of dealing with time constraints, the dangers of sending the same research to more than one periodical, preserving copyright and avoiding plagiarism.

9) Training new reviewers and acquainting them of the reviewing process. Introducing young researchers to scientific publishing, training graduate students in scientific research skills, writing skills, and electronic searching skills, and introducing them to sources of information in their area of specialty. In this regard, Lumsden (1984) conducted an experimental study in which he taught 52 graduate students a course on scholarly publishing. The results of the experiment showed that the publication rate for students who attended the course was 86%. The results of the experiment encouraged the introduction of similar courses in other graduate programs.

10) Establishing forums for scholarly journals to discuss, criticize and comment on studies published in the journal. Such activities can lead to new ideas for practices in its areas of specialty and prospective research in it. Providing advice to new professors who find themselves amidst teaching, working on research projects, administrative work, and other obligations. They talk about the challenges they face, how they faced those challenges, and how they became experienced authors.

11) To avoid delay in the review process, the editor-in-chief can send a short message to two referees with an abstract of the study to be reviewed, for an initial overview, and ask the referee to respond by accepting the research article or to reject the review, so that the article can be transferred to another reviewer, and the load is reduced. If the reviewer finds that the study is weak. The the number of papers that can be reviewed by one reviewer per year may be specified. To encourage specialists to participate in the peer review process, Mulligan (2004) recommended that the number of times a reviewer reviews articles for prestigious journals be considered part of his or her scholarly contributions. However, in the absence of such procedures, young reviewers can be given a certificate of appreciation or an official thank-you letters can be sent to the reviewers for their efforts at the end of the year and a list of the names of reviewers can be placed in the journal. The reviewers pointed out that receiving a reward for their reviews would reduce the objectivity of the evaluation and the evaluation would not be comprehensive and adequate for the submitted works.

Finally, investigating authors' and researchers' views of the current peer-reviewing and publishing practices nationally and internationally (in journals, conferences, research centers and others) is still open for further investigation in the future.

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ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6255-1305

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