

THE INTERIM AS DEVELOPMENTAL ACADEMIC JOURNAL

D.KOKT, L. LATEGAN AND R. DESSELS

Abstract

Research has two important objectives: the contribution to scientific discourse and the identification of solutions for the challenges societies, government, business and industry face. Research should be in the public domain. The publication and presentation of research results are important activities academics need to engage with. Through publications and presentations are societies informed of the positive influence and impact research can bring to them. This paper will focus on the importance of publications and how emerging scholars can be assisted to get their research published. A case study is presented of the Interim, an in-house academic journal.

Keywords: Interim academic journal, scientific writing, common errors in scientific writing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Before any research could be published it requires researchers to engage with the process of scientific writing. Scientific writing and the research process are inextricably linked and the skills to write scientifically should be developed and nurtured by universities. With this in mind, this article reflects on the Interim as a developmental academic journal. This initiative was launched in 2002 by the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT) with the purpose of affording emerging researchers (both students and staff) the opportunity to be exposed to peer review and to publish their research. The aims of this paper are to reflect on some common errors emerging researchers make and to also document the growth and contribution of the journal to the research outputs of the CUT.

With the importance of publishing one's research firmly established it cannot be denied that writing for publication is no easy undertaking. It requires dedication and the ability to refine and reflect on one's research on a continuous basis. This article highlights common errors made by authors that submitted their articles to the Interim as well as provide an indication of the staff and students that contributed to the publications. This will enable the editorial board to make a frank assessment of what has been achieved in order to plan for the future development of the journal.

2. PROCEDURES AND COMMON ERRORS

The Interim especially affords novice researchers the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the intricacies and challenges of publishing.

Once a paper has been published in the Interim it can be re-worked to be submitted to an accredited journal. Eighteen editions of the Interim were published between 2002 and 2011 constituting 202 articles. Articles are peer-reviewed internally and feedback is provided in the form of a workshop. After the workshop researchers are given the opportunity to make rectifications that should be re-submitted to the editor. An author is directly involved in the review and publication process which enable him/her to reflect on common errors made by other authors. This includes the following:

- Titles of papers: many titles are not representative of the contents of the paper and lack the alignment of aims and objectives to the title of the paper.
- Design: not all papers are well planned with an appropriate methodology and sufficient evidence in support of the research question.
- Research question: many papers lack a proper research question or hypothesis.
- Methodology: very often the methodology is not supportive of the research or authors don't know the difference between research method and research methodology.
- Literature review: too many authors simply repeat what is already stated in other papers instead of reflecting on and engaging with existing texts.
- Literature consulted: the latest texts are not always consulted.
- Conclusions: papers often have no new knowledge to add to an existing debate. Papers very often merely recycle what is already known in research.
- Referencing: authors do not always follow the appropriate referencing guidelines.
- Contents: not a clear understanding that a paper has different parts and that each part has a specific purpose and must not be repeated.
- Footnotes: very few authors understand what the purposes of footnotes are.
- Language: papers do not always meet grammar, style and discourse requirements.
- Scientific writing: not enough argumentation and critical reflection are evident in many papers.

- Ethical challenges: very often no evidence that basic ethical requirements are met such as recognition of funding agency, feedback to sample group, etc.
- Relevance of paper: some papers are just an add-on to what is already known.
- Technical requirements: papers do not always meet the technical requirements of the Interim (for example the length of the paper, the required referencing technique, they lay-out of the paper, etc.).

3. CONTRIBUTIONS IN TERMS OF STAFF, STUDENTS, POST DOCS AND OTHERS

This section relates the statistics relating to the contributions of students and staff, as well as to how many papers have been published in accredited journals.

Table 1 Contributions in terms of staff, post docs and others (2002-2010)

Edition	Staff	Students	Post doc	External contributors	Articles published in accredited journals
Year 1/1	13	0	0	4	0
Year 2/1	12	0	0	3	2
Year 2/2	11	1	0	3	0
Year 3/1	18	0	0	11	1
Year 3/2	13	3	0	3	0
Year 4/1	24	0	1	4	2
Year 4/2	17	2	2	3	2
Year 5/1	11	1	0	1	0
Year 5/2	14	0	0	4	1
Year 6/1	12	1	1	1	1
Year 6/2	13	2	0	0	2
Year 7/1	14	2	1	1	1
Year 7/2	16	2	0	3	0
Year 8/1	7	1	0	1	0
Year 8/2	17	1	1	0	0
Year 9/1	15	1	1	3	0
Year 9/2	13	1	0	7	0
Year 10/1	8	6	0	2	0
Total	248	24	7	54	12

The majority of the contributions were from staff members, followed by students, post-doctoral fellows and external contributors (includes contributors from other universities and research bodies). Table 1 show that 333 individuals contributed to 202 articles of which 75 per cent were from staff members, 7 per cent from students, 2 per cent from post docs and 16 per cent from individuals outside the CUT.

It should be noted that staff and students often published more than once in the journal. The total staff and students are therefore cumulative. The external contributors published in association with the university's staff and/or students. Seven citations could be reported (Harzing's Publish or Perish, Online) and the results show that 6 per cent of articles published in the Interim were published in accredited journals. It should be pointed out that often papers are reworked with a new title which makes it difficult to determine the exact number of papers published in accredited journals. It also happened that a number of Interim papers were integrated into a new paper which was then presented for publication. This makes it also difficult to identify the exact number of papers published in accredited journals.

3. EVALUATION

It is evident that as academic development journal the Interim plays an important role to assist emerging researchers with common challenges in the publication process. The Interim also plays an important role in developing published papers to be ready for publication in an accredited journal.