Scholarly manuscript assessment: Scientific journal editor desk evaluation

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ABSTRACT

Rejection of submitted articles during the editorial review process can be discouraging for authors. This study investigates the factors affecting manuscript acceptance and rejection by journal editors and proposes targeted training to enhance acceptance rates at the editorial review stage. Data were collected through online questionnaires from 42 international journal editors, interviews with five editors, and focus group discussions with graduate students. The findings reveal that editors consider six key criteria when deciding whether to accept manuscripts for peer review: originality, uniqueness, scope, appropriateness, relevance, and significance. Commonly rejected sections include the abstract, methods, and results. Insights from editor interviews and focus groups with early-career researchers shed light on the reasons for manuscript rejection and highlight specific sections with higher rejection rates. The study recommends that new researchers undertake courses in scientific writing to better understand editors' evaluation criteria and improve their chances of acceptance.

Keywords: Manuscript rejection; Editorial review; Journal acceptance criteria; Peer review process; Scholarly publishing.

INTRODUCTION

Publishing articles in internationally recognised journals is a key academic responsibility for students, lecturers, and researchers in higher education, often serving as a prerequisite for graduation (Merga, Mason, & Morris, 2020). For those who struggle with academic writing, publishing can feel like an overwhelming challenge (Wilhite, Fong, & Wilhite, 2019; Hosseini, Rasmussen, & Resnik, 2023). The processes of submission, peer review, revision, acceptance, and publication are demanding and complex. Authors risk having their submitted manuscript rejected if they do not adhere to the journal's publication guidelines (Merga, Mason, & Morris, 2020). After an article passes the initial assessment by the

journal's editors, it undergoes peer review. Experts in the field assess the article's originality, quality, significance, and methodology. Peer reviewers provide feedback, recommend revisions, or may reject the article entirely.

The editor evaluates the revised manuscript and decides whether to accept it, reject it or request further revisions (Corneille et al., 2023; Wilhite, Fong, & Wilhite, 2019). The authors are notified once the manuscript has been accepted and the article enters the publication phase. The manuscript is then proofread and formatted to ensure clarity, consistency, and adherence to journal style. However, depending on the scope and guidelines of the journal, editors may reject a research paper for several reasons (Biagioli et al., 2019), which includes: the work goes beyond the scope or focus of the journal; it might be irrelevant, too general or too specialised for the journal's target audience; and the manuscript lacks scientific rigour, significance and novelty (Argilés-Bosch, Garcia-Blandon & Ravenda, 2023). In addition, the article might be poorly written, with ambiguous or confusing language, syntax or organisation, methodological problems, a flawed study design or insufficient data to support its conclusions. The paper might cover topics or findings that have already been extensively studied and fail to offer new insights or substantially advance the existing knowledge base (Björk & Solomon, 2013). Additionally, the submission may not comply with the journal's specific reporting guidelines, word count limits, or formatting requirements (Xu et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, authors can benefit from editorial feedback when their manuscript is rejected. Understanding the reasons for rejection offers valuable insights for improving the quality of their work (Alam & Wilson, 2023; Martin, 2016). By addressing the editor's concerns and making necessary revisions, authors can enhance their manuscript and increase the chances of acceptance in another journal. Reasons for rejection provide authors with a valuable opportunity to gain insight into the expectations and standards of the journal and the wider academic community (Regan, 2021). Authors can use this feedback to refine their research skills, writing skills, and understanding of the conventions of scholarly communication.

Previous studies have investigated the manuscript writing requirements for both internationally indexed journals (Haleem, Javaid, & Singh, 2022; Kasneci et al., 2023; Malik et al., 2023) and national journals, including those from Indonesia (Malik et al., 2023; Mulyono, Suryoputro, & Jamil, 2021). Researchers have emphasised the importance of following guidelines to produce high-quality articles, receiving training on manuscript writing, and seeking advice on creating strong scientific publications (Jusslin & Widlund, 2021; Kasneci et al., 2023; Kondaveeti et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021). However, limited research addresses both the specific requirements for each section of a manuscript and the criteria journal editors use to accept or reject submissions. This study fills that gap by offering a detailed analysis of the rejection rates for different sections of articles and the factors influencing editorial decisions.

This study aims to provide an analysis of the reasons journal editors reject manuscript submissions during the peer review process and to identify key factors that encourage editors to advance submissions to the peer review stage. Additionally, it seeks to propose targeted training programmes for scientific writing, informed by the specific reasons for rejection cited by editors. The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

(a) What criteria do editors use to evaluate and approve manuscript submissions for publication in academic journals?
(b) Why do editors reject manuscripts based on manuscript elements during desk review?

(c) How can scientific training be organised to prevent rejection at the desk review stage?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic writing standards differ across journals, each outlining specific guidelines for the structure and components of manuscripts to maintain consistency and quality in their publications (Lindgreen & Di Benedetto, 2021). Typically, a manuscript comprises essential sections such as the title, abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, results, discussion, conclusion, and references. A well-structured abstract plays a crucial role by providing readers with a concise summary of the study's objectives, methods, results, and conclusions, allowing them to quickly assess the paper's relevance (Lindgren, Lundman, & Graneheim, 2020). An abstract is not just a mere summary of the manuscript, but serves as a hook to reach potential readers by highlighting the importance and originality of the study (Hartley, 2008). An abstract must include the research problem, methodology, key findings and implications succinctly but convincingly (Swales & Feak, 2009).

A well-written manuscript introduction provides essential background information, states the aim of the paper, outlines its scope, and presents the main thesis or argument, laying the foundation for the research (Lindgreen & Di Benedetto, 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). According to Paltridge and Starfield (2007), the introduction also includes the research problem and the significance of the study. The primary goal of the introduction is to capture the reader's interest, explain the importance of the research, and provide the necessary context.

Likewise, the literature review synthesises previous studies and serves several key functions: it highlights gaps in current knowledge, offers a theoretical framework, and justifies the need for the study (Ridley, 2012). A strong literature review critically analyses the existing body of work by discussing key ideas, hypotheses, research methods, and conclusions. In doing so, authors must position their research within the broader academic conversation (Booth, Sutton, & Papaioannou, 2016).

Furthermore, in the methodology section, readers can find sufficient information about the study's procedure and can check the reliability and validity of the results (Parmaxi, 2023). In the results or findings section, the authors explain the data in an understandable and structured way and provide an interpretation of the results to the research questions or hypotheses. The section may also include statistical analyses or other data analysis techniques to justify the conclusions drawn from the data (Burkhardt & Schoenfeld, 2003; Clarke & Visser, 2019).

Following this, the discussion section provides an explanation of the results. Here, authors interpret the findings in relation to previous studies and the research questions. A well-crafted discussion helps readers compare the study's results with existing literature (Burkhardt, 2013; Foster, 2024). Finally, the conclusion section succinctly reinforces the main findings of the research, summarising the core arguments and emphasising the significance of the study (Attia & Edge, 2017). Additionally, authors may use the conclusion to highlight broader implications of their findings and suggest practical applications or future research directions.

Research has shown that structured academic training or interventions can enhance students' synthesis and writing skills. For instance, Boscolo et al. (2007) demonstrated that

a 12-week programme involving structured exercises and feedback significantly improved students' writing. The training included discussions of poor and good examples of academic writing. Similarly, Wischgoll (2017) found that academic writing instruction, which incorporates strategies like text structuring, summarising, and intensive feedback, positively impacts university students. Undergraduate students tend to benefit more from informational tutoring, while postgraduate students improve through "try-again" feedback.

Building on these findings from the literature, this study proposes a training programme designed to address common causes of editorial rejection. By combining intensive, structured exercises with peer and faculty feedback, and targeted instruction, the programme aims to help writers enhance their academic writing skills. This approach will better equip authors to avoid rejection at the initial assessment stage.

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Data were gathered using an online questionnaire via Google Forms, interviews with journal editors conducted on Zoom, and focus group discussions (FGD). The questionnaire featured both open and closed questions, designed to investigate the reasons journal editors accept or reject manuscript submissions. These reasons were examined in relation to standard manuscript components, including the title, abstract, introduction, literature review, methods, results, discussion, conclusion, suggestions, and references.

The questionnaire was emailed to 100 journal editors selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (a) Editors of internationally reputable indexed journals (Scopus, Web of Science, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)) and Indonesian indexed journals (on SINTA[1]); (b) Editors with over five years of experience; (c) Focused on journals in the fields of language, linguistics, and educational science, reflecting the expertise of the research team. The questionnaires were distributed from June 2023 to March 2024. Despite five follow-up reminders, only 42 journal editors responded, resulting in a response rate of 42 percent. These participants included editors from twelve Scopus-indexed journals, eight Web of Science-indexed journals, fourteen DOAJ-indexed journals, and eight Sinta-indexed journals.

In a follow-up study, interviews were conducted with five editors-in-chief to gain deeper insights into their reasons for accepting or rejecting manuscript submissions. Additionally, a focus group discussion (FGD) was held with five editors-in-chief of international journals (denoted as JER2-JER5) and 70 research students (denoted as GSR) from two universities in East Java Province, Indonesia. The purpose of this session was to gather input on designing effective training programmes and to obtain practical advice on strategies to minimise manuscript rejection.

[1] SINTA (Science and Technology Index) is an Indonesian indexing system that provides a database of scientific and technological journals published in Indonesia. It is managed by the Ministry of Research and Technology of Indonesia and aims to improve the visibility and impact of Indonesian research by indexing local journals and making them accessible for citation and reference. SINTA covers various academic disciplines and provides metrics to evaluate the quality and performance of journals and researchers in Indonesia.

Before data collection, participants received a consent form detailing the research purpose, methods, data usage, and associated risks and benefits. The form emphasised that their autonomy in decision-making would be fully respected. Participants were also informed that they would have free access to the research incorporating their data. Informed consent for the research instruments used was obtained from the Universitas Sumatera Utara Research Centre, under approval No. 733/UN3.3.2.1/LP.2023.

The survey data were analysed by first compiling all responses into a structured format using Google Forms. Data visualization techniques, including bar charts, were applied to analyse frequency distributions, segment the data based on key variables, and present key findings through graphs, tables, and visual reports. Interview data were analysed by transcribing the recordings, becoming familiar with the content, and coding the data with labels representing key concepts. This process was followed by thematic analysis, where key themes were identified using codes that reflect the main ideas discussed in the interviews. Themes were then formulated and supported with direct quotes from the participants. The FGD data were analysed through transcription, familiarization, initial coding, and thematic analysis. This analysis also included assessing group interactions and summarizing the key findings.

FINDINGS

The following section presents the key findings from the analysis, highlighting the criteria used by editors to evaluate and approve manuscript submissions for academic journals, the reasons manuscripts are rejected during the desk review based on their elements, and the ways in which scientific training can be structured to reduce the likelihood of rejection at the desk review stage.

Criteria for Manuscript Acceptance during Desk Evaluation

Journal editors assess six key factors when determining whether to accept manuscripts during the desk evaluation process, including originality, significance, and novelty. Table 1 provides a detailed breakdown of these factors. According to data from 42 editors, the primary reasons for manuscript acceptance were: relevance of the topic (95.02%), alignment with the journal's scope (92.85%), novelty of the research (90.47%), significance of the research (88.09%), appropriateness of the topic (85.71%), and originality of the research (80.93%).

Topic relevance and conformity to the journal's scope

The factors influencing manuscript acceptance based on topic relevance and alignment with the journal's scope are illustrated below. Figure 1 demonstrates how these factors affect acceptance decisions. For topic relevance, it identifies the primary reasons for acceptance as grammar and style fit (96%), fact-checking (95%), and audience analysis (94%), with an average score of 96.03 percent for these sub-domains. Regarding conformity to the journal's scope, respondents emphasised three main criteria: research topic conformity (95.23%), suitability of methodology and topic (92.85%), and alignment of manuscript content with the journal's scope (92.85%), yielding an average score of 92.85 percent. Furthermore, Figure 1 outlines the criteria based on appropriateness, including the relevance of the journal's latest publication (90.47%), the manuscript's section relevance (85.71%), and overall topic relevance to the journal (83.33%), with a mean score of 86.5 percent.

Table 1: Reasons for Manuscript Acceptance by Journal Editors (N=42)

No	Acceptance Reasons	Description	No	%
1	Relevance of the topic	Audience analysis, grammar and style fit, fact-checking	40	95.02
2	Conformity to the journal's scope	Methodology, topic research conformity, fit journal scope	39	92.85
3	Novelty of the research	Different from previous works, novel findings, novel methods	38	90.47
4	Significance of the research	Contribution to knowledge, practical applications, theoretical implications, global relevance, innovative solutions	37	88.09
5	Appropriateness of the topic	Alignment with journal scope, fit journal target audience	36	85.71
6	Originality of the research	Research questions, innovative methods, unique data, new theoretical models, interdisciplinary integration	34	80.93

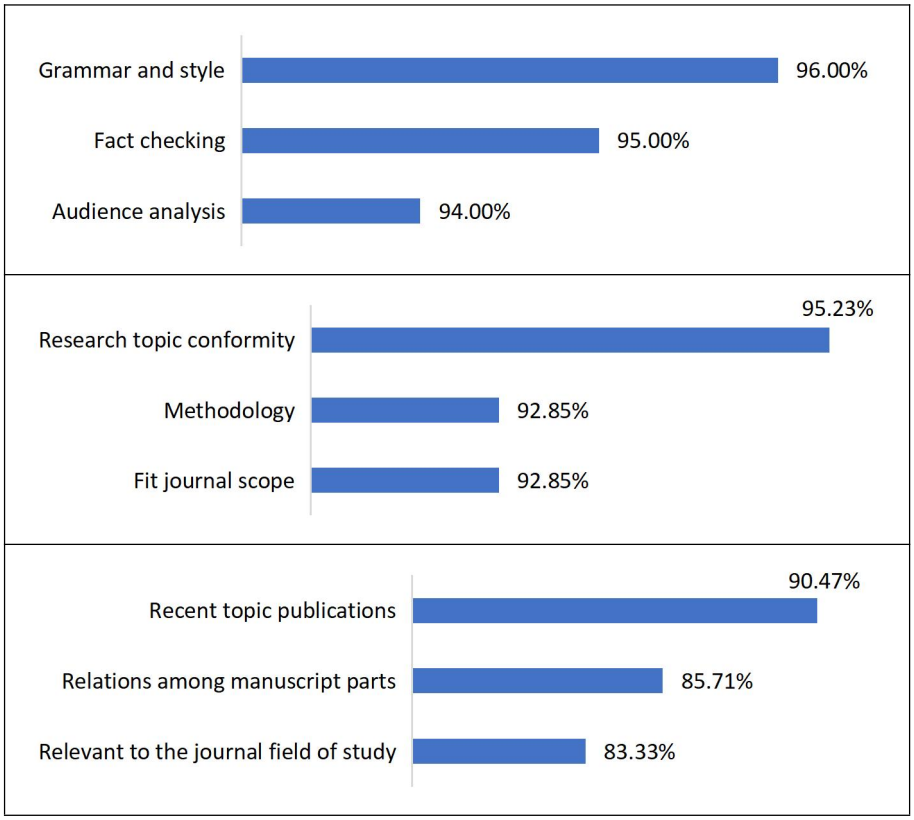

Figure 1: Factors Influencing Manuscript Acceptance Based on Topic Relevance and Journal Scope.

Research originality, significance, novelty

The respondents identified several key reasons for accepting manuscript submissions based on research originality, significance, and novelty. Figure 2 illustrates these factors. A total of 40 respondents (95.23%) emphasised that research must be grounded in empirical evidence. Additionally, 37 respondents (88.09%) highlighted the importance of addressing new problems and findings, while 32 respondents (76.10%) stressed the need for research outputs to contribute to existing knowledge.

When evaluating manuscripts based on the significance of the research, editors considered three main factors: the relevance of research results to existing knowledge (85.71%), the connection between the topics discussed and real-world problems (88.09%), and the ability of the research to offer solutions to practical issues (97.61%). The average percentage score for these factors is 90.47 percent.

In terms of novelty, editors accepted manuscripts that demonstrated the ability to present practical implications (92.23%), highlighted the uniqueness of the research topic (91.09%), and introduced new research methods, techniques, or approaches (91.59%). The average percentage score for novelty-related factors is 91.63 percent

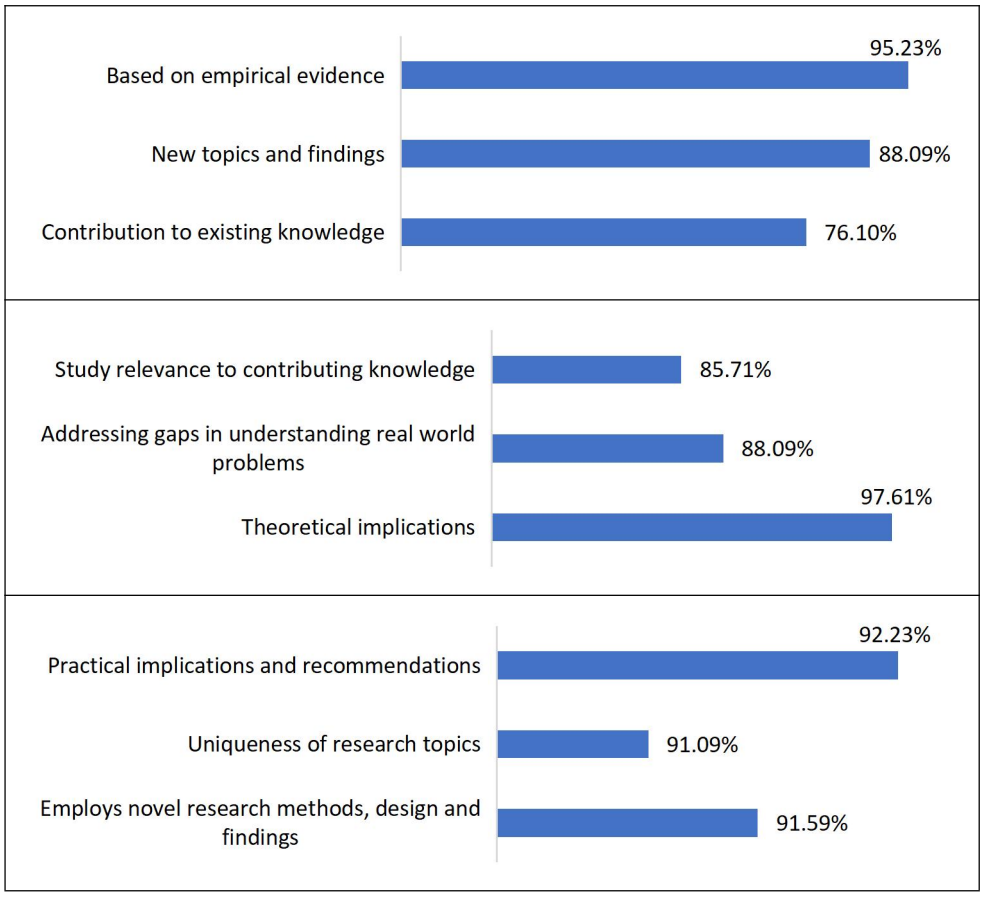

Figure 2: Key Reasons for Manuscript Acceptance based on Research Originality, Significance and Novelty

Rejection Reasons based on Manuscript Components

Figure 3 shows the frequency of manuscript rejections by journal editors based on specific sections of the article. The data highlights that the most frequently rejected sections are the abstract (88.09%), method (87.75%), and results (84.28%), with rejection rates classified as "very high." Sections with "high" rejection rates include the introduction (80.15%), discussion (76.19%), and literature review (68.57%). The conclusion (68.23%) also falls within this category. Sections with lower rejection rates include references (27.97%) and the title (28.30%), which are categorised as "low" in terms of rejection frequency.

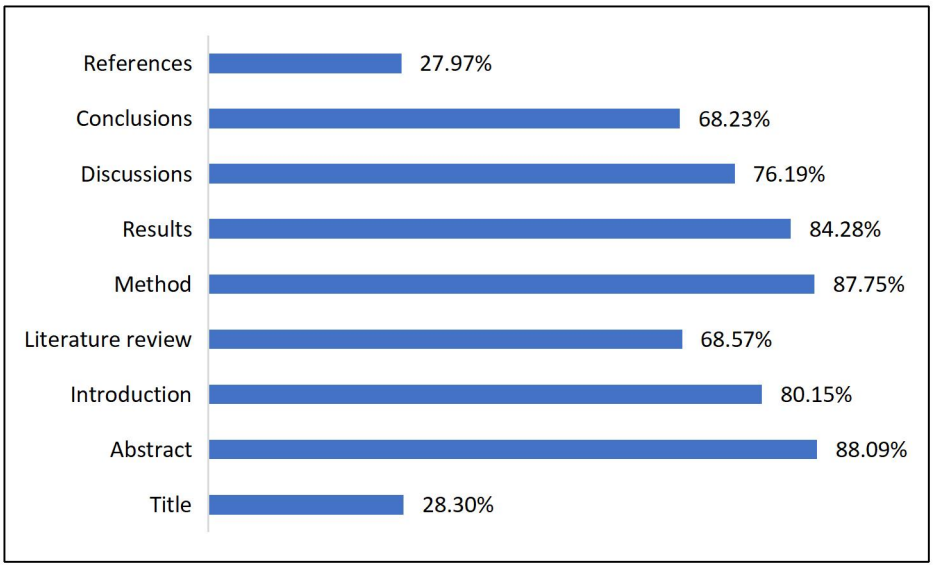

Figure 3: Manuscript Rejections by Journal Editors based on Specific Sections of the Article

Specific rejections based on title and abstract

As shown in Figure 4, journal editors identified three key reasons for rejecting the title and abstract components of manuscripts. These include a mismatch between the title and the research results (28.57%), titles that are overly general and lack specificity (23.8%), and titles that are ambiguous or overly sensational (19.04%). However, these reasons fall into the "low rejection" category, as they typically do not lead to the rejection of the entire manuscript. In addition, Figure 4 highlights the reasons editors reject manuscripts based on abstract content. Common issues include poor structure and writing quality (92.85%), failure to follow the IMRaD (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion) format (92.85%), lack of clarity (90.47%), and misinterpretation of findings and discussions (76.85%). The rejection rate for this section reached 88.09 percent.

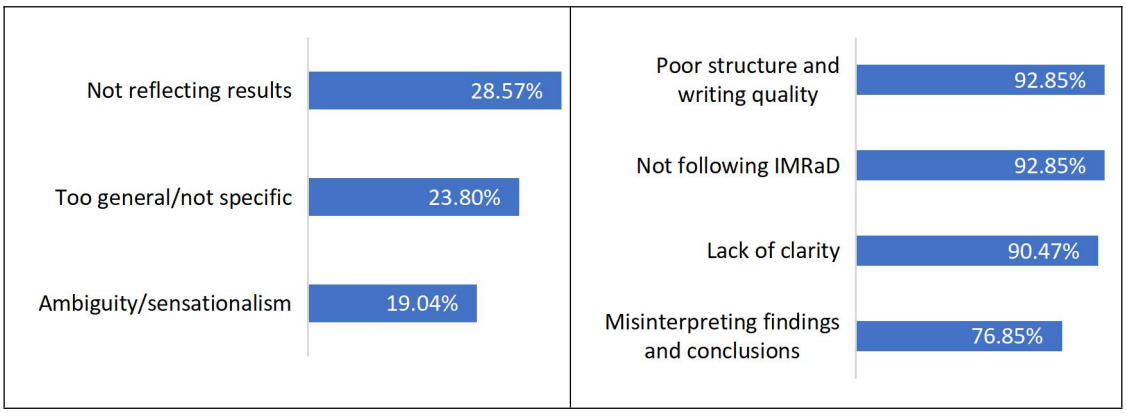

Figure 4: Reasons for Journal Editors' Rejection of Manuscripts Based on Title and Abstract Components

Rejection reasons for introduction and literature review

Journal editors cite several reasons for rejecting manuscripts based on their introduction and literature review sections. Some of the main factors are depicted in Figure 5. In the introduction, five dominant reasons for rejection stand out. These include the absence of a clear research gap or novelty (95.23%), weak justification for the research or contribution, and insufficient context, both at 90.47 percent, incomplete or missing references to

previous studies (83.33%), and the lack of clearly stated research questions or objectives (47.61%). The overall rejection rate for this section falls into the high category, reaching 80.15 percent.

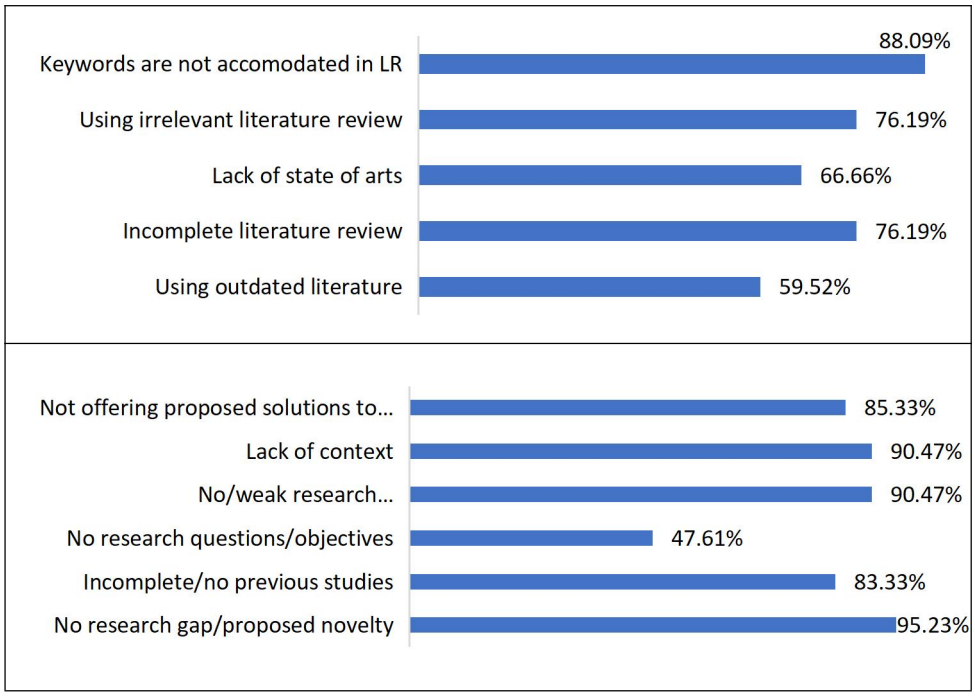

Figure 5: Reasons for Journal Editors' Rejection of Manuscripts based on Issues in the Introduction and Literature Review Sections

In the literature review section, six key reasons for rejection are highlighted. The most frequent issues include failure to elaborate on the keywords from the abstract within the literature review (88.08%), incomplete or insufficiently thorough literature reviews (76.19%), the absence of state-of-the-art research (66.66%), and reliance on outdated sources (59.52%). The average rejection rate for the literature review section stands at 68.57 percent.

Specific rejections based on method and result

Respondents highlighted several reasons for manuscript rejection in the methods and results sections, as shown in Figure 6. For the methods section, editors pointed to six key factors, including inadequate research design and participant demographics (95.23%), inappropriate statistical analysis (88.09%), insufficient description of data analysis procedures (85.71%), unsuitable research design and instruments (85.71%), unclear data collection procedures (80.95%), and concerns over validity and reliability (69.04%). The average rejection rate for these issues is 87.75 percent.

For the results section, editors noted four main reasons for rejection, also presented in Figure 6. These include results that fail to address the research questions or objectives (95.23%), unclear presentation of findings (90.47%), over-interpretation of results (73.80%), and insufficient statistical support or analysis (71.42%). The average rejection rate for this section is 84.28 percent.

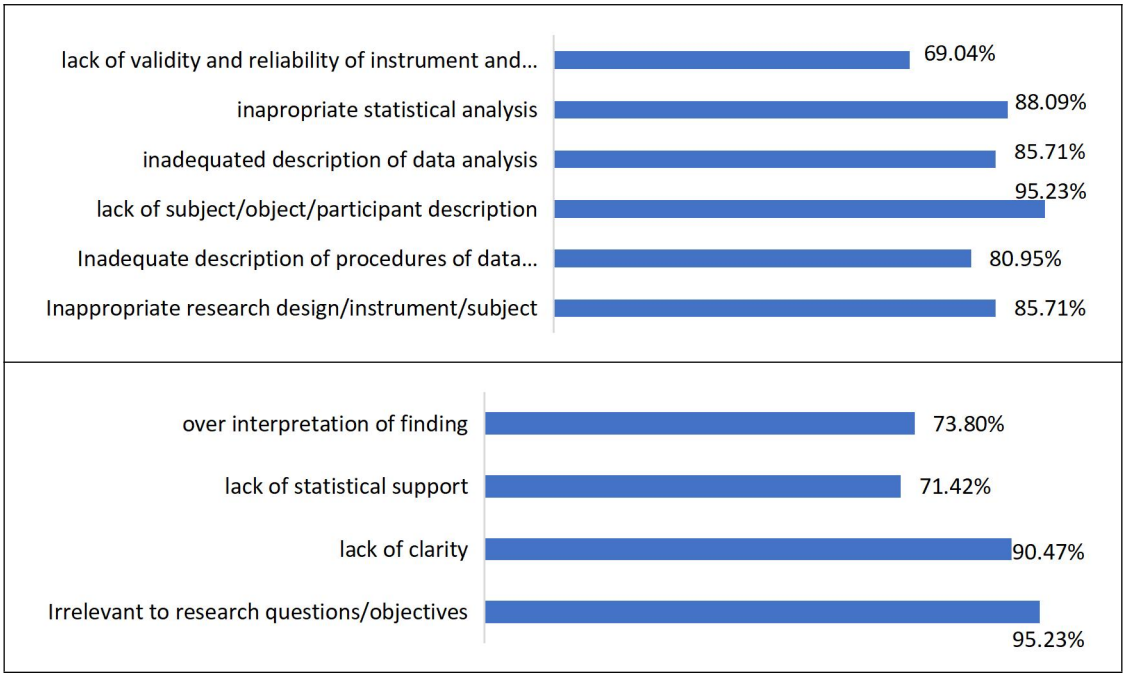

Figure 6: Reasons for Journal Editors' Rejection of Manuscripts based on Methods and Results

Specific rejections based on discussion and conclusions

Figure 7 outlines seven key reasons for journal editors' rejection of the discussion section in manuscripts. These reasons include the absence of a clear research contribution (92.85%), lack of comparison between the current results and previous research or theory (92.85%), failure to highlight the novelty of the findings (90.47%), incoherent arguments (78.57%), merely restating or paraphrasing the results without deeper analysis (64.28%), over-interpretation of findings (59.52%), and failure to mention research limitations (54.76%). The average rejection rate for these issues is 76.19 percent.

Additionally, Figure 7 presents six common reasons for rejection in the conclusion section. These include the omission of research limitations that should be addressed in future studies (88.09%), over-generalization of findings and lack of critical reflection (80.95%), unsupported claims (57.14%), repeating the discussion content (52.38%), failure to provide a concise summary of key findings (31.42%), and lack of implications (29.52%). The average rejection rate for these reasons is 68.23 percent.

Specific rejections based on references

Although the percentage of editor rejections in the reference section falls within the low (common) category, this study identifies several reasons for manuscript rejection based on issues in the reference section, as shown in Figure 8. These reasons include inconsistent or incomplete formatting of references (47.61%), lack of diversity in publishers or excessive self-citations (28.57%), incomplete citations (19.40%), and the use of outdated sources (16.60%). The average rejection rate for this section is relatively low at 27.97 percent.

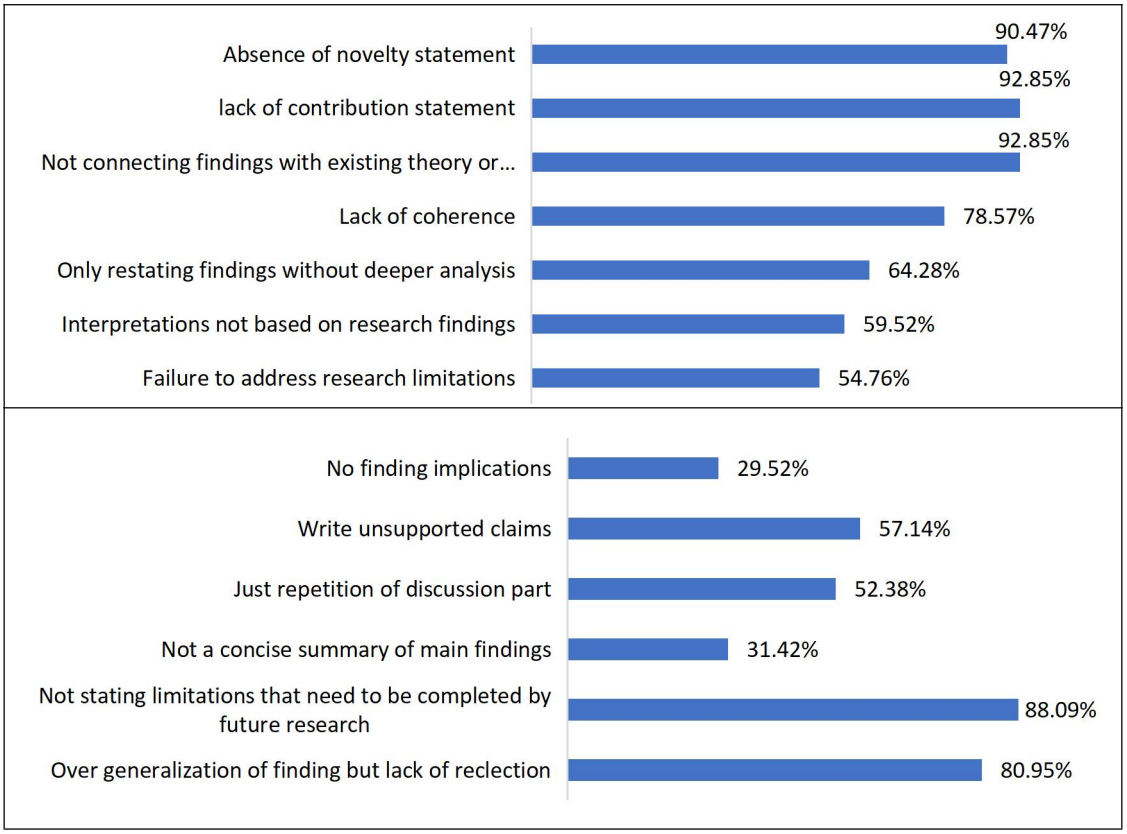

Figure 7: Reasons for Journal Editors' Rejection of Manuscripts based on Discussion and Conclusions

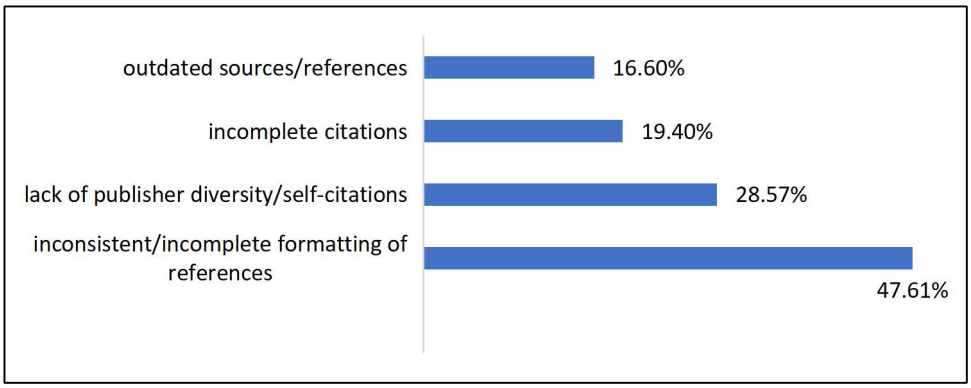

Figure 8: Reasons for Manuscript Rejection based on the Reference Section

Scientific Writing Training to Prevent Desk Evaluation Rejection

The results of FGDs with two groups of graduates, Group A and Group B, along with interview sessions with journal editors, revealed new insights into improving academic writing skills. Graduates emphasised the need for targeted training to meet the standards of good academic writing and align with the expectations of journal editors. This is reflected in the interactive discussions with respondents from two graduates (GSR 5B and GSR 11A):

> *"The results of this survey have opened our eyes to how journal editors evaluate submitted manuscripts; they emphasise important points that our manuscripts must*

> *fulfil. In our scientific writing course, we do not have much knowledge about writing good manuscripts. We can use the results of this survey to avoid rejections by journal editors*" (GSR 5B)

When asked about the sections of their manuscripts most prone to criticism from editors, which ultimately led to rejection, one of the interview participants provided the following response:

> "*.... as novice writers, we have problems in writing all parts of a manuscript. However, the parts of our manuscripts that are often criticised are the introduction, results and discussion. Some editors have extended the criticism to these parts, other editors have also rejected our manuscripts without a clear explanation. The results of this survey have informed us about the reasons for rejection. Therefore, we need writing exercises that specifically sharpen our ability to express the key cores, such as how to express research gaps, novelty, and research connections"* (GSR 11).

Participants in the FGDs also shared their experiences regarding the reasons for manuscript rejection by journal editors. The most commonly cited factors included issues with clarity and precision, lack of a logical structure, weak methodology, inadequate statistical analysis, inaccuracies in data, concerns over the validity and reliability of research findings, and insufficient context for the study's significance. This aligns with the views expressed by five senior journal editors (JER) during interviews. They emphasised the importance of student writers undergoing scientific writing training to develop manuscripts suitable for publication in prestigious international journals. One editor noted:

> "*to help novice writers improve their manuscript writing skills, it's important that they learn how to highlight the originality, significance, and novelty of their work, while also making sure the topic aligns with the journal's focus. This is the first thing we look for when evaluating a manuscrip*t" (JER2].

Additionally, they noted that novice writers need training to emphasise aspects such as relevance, alignment with the journal's scope, identification of research gaps or novelty, significance, appropriateness, and originality in their writing. According to one of the senior editors (JER1), all these elements can be found empirically or implicitly in submitted manuscripts. Student writers often do not consider these aspects when submitting their papers. While novice writers may occasionally understand the assessment criteria outlined in a journal's guidelines, they often struggle to effectively incorporate these elements into their manuscripts. Seeking feedback from experts or mentors before submitting their work, or participating in academic writing workshops, can significantly improve their chances of success.

> *"novice writers need to be trained to express originality, significance, gaps, or novelty in their writing. They also need to make sure their topic matches the journal they're submitting to. Getting feedback from writing pros before submitting a paper helps a lot, and all this can of course be picked up through some intensive writing training"* (JER5)

Findings from interviews with journal editors and FGDs with graduates highlight the crucial need for intensive academic writing training for novice authors. This training should focus on improving each component of a manuscript, addressing the common reasons editors cite for rejection. A targeted approach like this is key to helping writers enhance the clarity and accuracy of their work in every section of the manuscript.

DISCUSSION

This discussion highlights the key findings from journal editors, focusing on the reasons behind manuscript rejections and the advice given to researchers. It summarises the collective views on common rejection reasons and provides guidance on how to address them. The study identifies six crucial factors for manuscript acceptance: originality, significance, gap/novelty, scope/fit, appropriateness, and relevance. The most critical factors are the alignment of the research topic with the journal's scope and the presence of significant research gaps or novelty. These findings are consistent with previous research by Braun and Clarke (2023), Lindgreen and Di Benedetto (2021), Mallett et al. (2012), and Toroser et al. (2017), which also emphasised the importance of these components in the manuscript evaluation process.

The study offers more detailed insights into the acceptance criteria used by journal editors, expanding on each sub-area of evaluation. While different editors may prioritise acceptance criteria differently (Jusslin & Widlund, 2021; Kondaveeti et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021), they generally follow similar patterns and focus areas when assessing manuscript quality. Key factors include how well the manuscript aligns with the journal's readership and scope, the appropriateness of the content and methodology, and adherence to ethical guidelines. Editors also evaluate how the paper fits within their publication schedule and meets editorial criteria. These findings are consistent with previous research on manuscript acceptance (Corneille et al., 2023; Wilhite, Fong, & Wilhite, 2019). However, this study provides a more detailed breakdown of the three primary factors - originality, novelty, and significance - and includes specific percentage values for each.

Respondents highlight the importance of originality, which pertains to the innovation and uniqueness of concepts, methods, conclusions, or interpretations. This focus aligns with previous research (Shamay-Tsoory et al., 2011), emphasising that originality involves contributing new ideas, theories, or perspectives to the field. Such contributions enhance understanding and often lay the groundwork for further research and development (Nazim & Ali, 2023; Saragih & Yannuar, 2024).

In addition, respondents underscore the value of research significance, which concerns the importance, relevance, and potential impact of a study. They argue that research should advance knowledge, address critical questions, solve practical problems, or contribute to societal and scientific progress. Significance can be demonstrated by filling gaps in the literature, influencing theory or practice, addressing current issues, and fostering further research or applications, as supported by previous studies (Barrot, 2023; Jusslin & Widlund, 2021; Mallett et al., 2012).

When it comes to the scope of a journal, editors consider the range of topics, subjects, or disciplines it encompasses. Some journals have a broad scope, addressing various areas within a larger field, while others focus narrowly on a specific subfield or topic (Nazim & Ali, 2023; Toroser et al., 2017). Editors also pay close attention to the methodological aspects of submissions. This includes assessing the appropriateness, rigor, and validity of the research methods used. The evaluation covers various elements of the research methodology, such as study design, data collection techniques, sampling procedures, data analysis, and the interpretation of results.

Previous research highlights essential principles for writing scholarly articles (Aitchison, 2009), developing high-quality research (Lindgreen & Di Benedetto, 2021), and addressing

reviewer rejection reasons (Braun & Clarke, 2023). It also sheds light on understanding the journal review process and the reasons for manuscript rejection from the authors' perspective (Alvesson, 2003). Prospective authors are advised to carefully review and respond to editors' feedback, incorporating constructive criticism to enhance their manuscripts (Tort, Targino, & Amaral, 2012). Additionally, adherence to journal guidelines—such as formatting, word limits, and citation styles—is crucial to ensure compliance and streamline the editorial process. By focusing on these areas, training programmes can equip researchers with the skills and practices needed to produce high-quality manuscripts that are more likely to be accepted by journal editors.

This research highlights key reasons why journal editors advance manuscripts from desk evaluations to the review stage, offering insights into the essential criteria for manuscript acceptance. The study identifies primary evaluation criteria such as research originality, significance, novelty or gap, scope, and appropriateness, which are crucial across scientific disciplines. It reveals that while these criteria are generally applied, some editors place additional emphasis on factors related to submission volume (Rezaei & Naghibian, 2018). The study also sheds light on common reasons for manuscript rejection during peer review, pinpointing issues related to the completeness and quality of sections such as the summary, methods, results, and discussion. These sections are pivotal as they encapsulate the core elements of the research, making them critical for readers to understand the paper's overall contribution. Conversely, aspects like the title, literature review, conclusion, and references are less frequently cited as reasons for rejection.

Importantly, this study contributes to the literature by detailing how the rigor of evaluation criteria can vary based on scientific discipline and submission volume, thus providing a nuanced understanding of the manuscript evaluation process. This insight can guide researchers in addressing specific areas of concern to improve their chances of acceptance, and inform journal editors about the broader implications of their evaluation practices (Nazim & Ali, 2023; Paul et al., 2021).

The findings from this study can be instrumental in designing effective training programmes for novice writers, aimed at reducing manuscript rejection rates and improving publication acceptance (Saragih, Zein, & Sumbayak, 2023). Incorporating training focused on the reasons behind manuscript acceptance and rejection into university-level scientific writing courses can significantly enhance writers' understanding of journal guidelines across various disciplines.

The training should start with an overview of journal writing guidelines to familiarise participants with general requirements. Following this, instructors should emphasise the key acceptance criteria that editors use: originality, significance, novelty/gap, scope, and appropriateness. Subsequently, the training should cover the essential components of a manuscript, including the title, abstract, keywords, introduction, literature review, methods, results, discussion, conclusion, acknowledgements, and references. Finally, the programme should guide writers on how to effectively incorporate these acceptance criteria into each manuscript component—for example, how to highlight novelty in the discussion section. This training can be delivered either in-person or through online platforms (Zou et al., 2022). Evidence suggests that such targeted training can enhance novice writers' acceptance rates and boost their motivation to publish in internationally recognised journals.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study underscore the importance of understanding both the reasons for manuscript acceptance and rejection by journal editors. For novice authors aiming to reduce rejection rates and improve acceptance chances in prestigious journals, intensive manuscript writing training is essential. Given the complex role of journal editors in assessing manuscripts, which involves evaluating quality and potential while adhering to fairness and integrity aligned with the journal's goals and scope, authors must be acutely aware of the criteria for acceptance and rejection.

The study identifies six key criteria that editors prioritize during the desk review stage: originality, significance, novelty/gap, scope/fit, appropriateness, and relevance. It also highlights that manuscripts are most frequently rejected due to issues in the abstract, methods, and results sections. These sections are particularly critical and should be meticulously prepared to avoid rejection. These insights provide valuable guidance for authors seeking to enhance the quality of their manuscripts and improve acceptance rates during the editorial review process. While each journal may have specific criteria for manuscript acceptance, the general principles identified in this study are widely applicable across various scientific disciplines. Additionally, the findings can inform the development of academic writing training programs at the university level. Future research should aim to address any gaps identified in this study by including a broader range of editors from different fields and employing diverse research methods. Such efforts will contribute to a deeper understanding of how to enhance academic writing across various disciplines.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author declares no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

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