

Scientific Publication is Dominated by First World Countries

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There is a perception among authors of scientific articles from “developing” or “third world” countries that when they submit their research papers to international journals, the most frequent response is a rejection. Is there a bias against publication of scientific papers from developing countries by Editors of internationally published journals (usually based in “developed” or “first world” countries)? Zielinski¹ (World Health Organisation) editorialised in the *British Medical Journal* in 1995 that the “2% participation in international scientific discourse allowed by Western indexing services is simply too little to account for the scientific output of 80% of the world”. We see two problems therefore—firstly, a real difficulty for scientists from developing countries to have their research published in international journals, and secondly, a very definite uphill task in getting third world journals represented in Medline or the Scientific Citation Index (SCI).

It has also been the experience of some scientists from third world countries that their papers are accepted by international journals when they were working on their research at some US or European centre, but when they moved back to their own country and doing ongoing research, the papers are not accepted for publication. This indicates a bias against the country where the paper comes from rather than against the author.

In some developing countries the local authorities themselves discriminate against publishing in their own local journals by giving more merit points to articles published in international journals as opposed to papers published in their local journals. Unwittingly the authorities might be encouraging “poor quality papers” in their own local journals, and this itself might lend to difficulties in getting the journal onto Medline or the SCI. In some countries, publishing in English may be a problem, causing poor acceptance by international journals.

The Scientific Citation Index² lists the share of mainstream journal articles as follows: US = 30.8%, UK = 7.9%, Germany = 7.2%, Japan = 8.2%, and Singapore has a figure of 0.18%. There is an obvious domination by the US and Europe in international scientific literature. Quite often too, the third world authors’ papers may not be listed in the references for similar scientific work!

Prejudice against third world authors could be reduced by “blinding” the reviewers of the papers as to the authorship and origin of the papers; this may not however be a very practicable solution to removing such prejudice. The hope for the future lies perhaps in electronic publication. With the use of the Internet it is possible that peer reviewing of articles would be faster, and the third world author could get his abstract onto the Internet and thus have a far-reaching audience which current hard copy journals limit. In the not too distant future, electronic publication may provide the solution that authors and editors from developing countries are looking for.

REFERENCES

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2. Scientific Citation Index. Scientific American Research, 1994.

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