

The Use of English Language In Research; The Good And The Bad

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ABSTRACT

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Use of English Language in Research, the Good and the Bad

The study probed the good and the bad of the use of English language in research. It also determined whether academics (lecturers) and postgraduate students experience pressure to publish research papers in English, and if they support the use of English in research. Purposive sample was used to gather data from 800 participants comprising 400 academics (lecturers), and 400 postgraduate students from 8 out of the 16 regions of Ghana. It found among other things that 57% of the respondents as the majority said that they have experienced pressure to publish research papers in English before, while 43% of them being the minority confirmed that they have never experienced pressure to publish research papers in English before. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among other things that researchers should be allowed to publish in languages that they are fully competent in.

1. Introduction

English remains the language of choice for many academic journals. There are many languages worldwide. However, researchers experience pressure to publish in English. Some people are of the opinion that researchers who lack command over English will not be able to articulate their ideas, opinions, hypothesis and insight about their research and share the findings of their research to benefit academia and society in general so researchers should be free to publish in languages that they can speak fluently and write perfectly. Further, they argue that research papers that are often rejected by journals are not just the ones with bad writing skills in English, but those with wrong vocabulary or sentence structures. However, others think differently. They advance that there is absolutely nothing wrong with researchers being pressured to publish in English since English is a global academic language. According to Schutz (2005) English is incontrovertibly recognized as the most essential language to learn by the increasingly mobile international community, and it has become the official language of the business and scientific world. Moreover, Graddol (2006) established that English as the global academic language expedites the international mobility of young researchers.

In addition, the high impact factor of many English journals is among the many reasons international researchers want to publish with them, and having their papers published in these journals can be crucial for career advancement (aje.com).

Besides, regular efforts to be recognized as having internationally compatible quality and to gain the highest possible reputation is what compelled non-native English researchers to publish in English at expense of extra time and effort (Kumju, 2005). However, Bortolus (2012) adduced that the biggest issue confronting non-native English writers who want to publish in English journal is the incessant rejection of their papers because of the non-standard use of English. Further, Bortolus stated that in fact,

many high impact journals including PLOS and PNAS suggest that researchers who need writing assistance should do so before submitting their papers for publishing.

Moreover, any studies have established that the inequality and segregation in science is occasioned by the use of English in academia (Flowerdew, 1999; Pabon-Escobar et al, 2006; Muresan et al, 2014; Curry et al, 2017; Hanauer et al, 2019). These inequalities affect the scientific community at many levels. Besides, other studies observed that in local communities of English as a foreign language (EFL) country, scientific reasoning is hampered, especially in higher education since learning hinges on cultural attitude acquired from native language spoken by the students, and science becomes alien to their own experiences (Gulbranden et al, 2002; Lee et al, 2007; de Vasconcelos Hage, 2006).

Again, Ozdemir (2014) argued that academics are inclined to publish in English not just to share their study in academia, but also, due to the pressure that may confront them at work.

What is more, Bruzzi (2006) stated that English is the language of the most extensively read and cited medical journals. Several non-native authors of English find this challenging. They battle with this challenge just as native English-speaking professionals are confronted with language barriers in countries where a different language is spoken. Due to this linguistics hurdles, English as international language (EIL) authors tend to assume that their papers are more less likely to be accepted than papers from native speakers of English.

3. Methodology

The study probed the good and the bad of the use of English language in research. The study population consisted of academics (lecturers) and postgraduate students in 8 out of the 16 regions of Ghana. Having observed all the necessary ethical considerations, purposive sample was used to gather data from 800 participants consisting of 400 academics and 400 postgraduate students. The purposive sampling technique was used because it enabled the researcher to produce a sample that could be logically accepted to be representative of the population.

Data for the study was obtained from primary sources. The researcher constructed a questionnaire for the sampled population. Each of the respondents was given a set of questionnaires and guided to answer. Data collected was analyzed with Excel. The response of each respondent was written down and tagged by a research identity whereas tables and graphs were used to present data from primary sources.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1 Regional Breakdown of Tertiary Institutions

S/N	Regions	Tertiary Institutions Sampled	Sample Size	
			Academics (Lecturers)	PG Students
1	Greater-Accra	1. University of Ghana	25	25
		2. University of Professional Studies	25	25

2	Bono	1.University of Energy and Natural Resources	35	30
		2. Sunyani Technical University	35	0
3	Upper West	1.S.D Dombo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies	35	30
		2.Wa Technical University	35	0
4	Upper East	1.C K. Tedam University of Technology and Applied Science	35	30
		2. Bolgatanga Technical University	35	0
5	Ashanti	1.Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology	25	25
		2.Kumasi Technical University	25	25
6	Volta	1.University of Health and Allied Sciences	25	25
		2. Ho Technical University	25	25
7	Western	1. University of Mines and Technology	25	25
		2. Takoradi Technical University	25	25
8	Northern	1. University for Development Studies	35	30
		2. Tamale Technical University	35	0

Response Rate: The response rate was 89% and 92% for academics (lecturers) and postgraduate students respectively. 427 academics (lecturers) responded to the questionnaire while 294 postgraduate students responded to the questionnaire. This is illustrated in table 2 below.

Table 2 Respondent

Respondent	Sample Size	Response Rate	Actual Size
Academics (Lecturers)	480	89%	427
Postgraduate Students	320	92%	294
Total	800		721

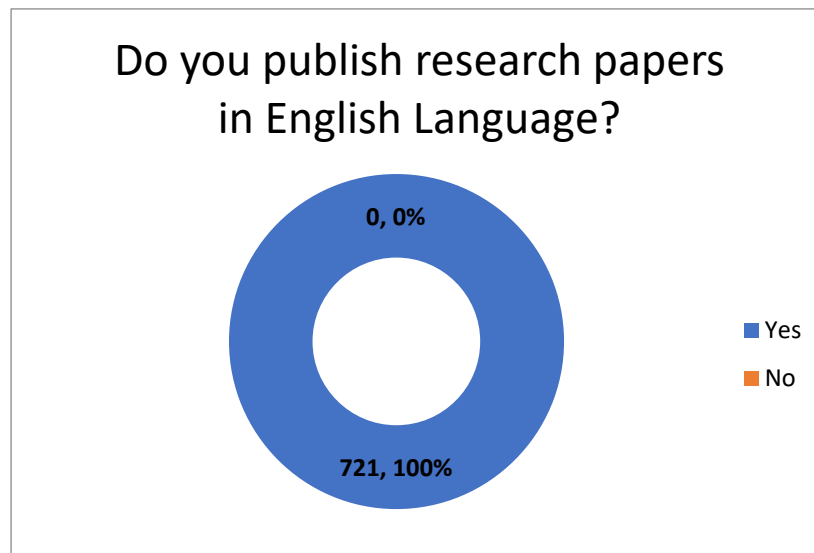


Figure 1 The Usage of English Language in Research Publication

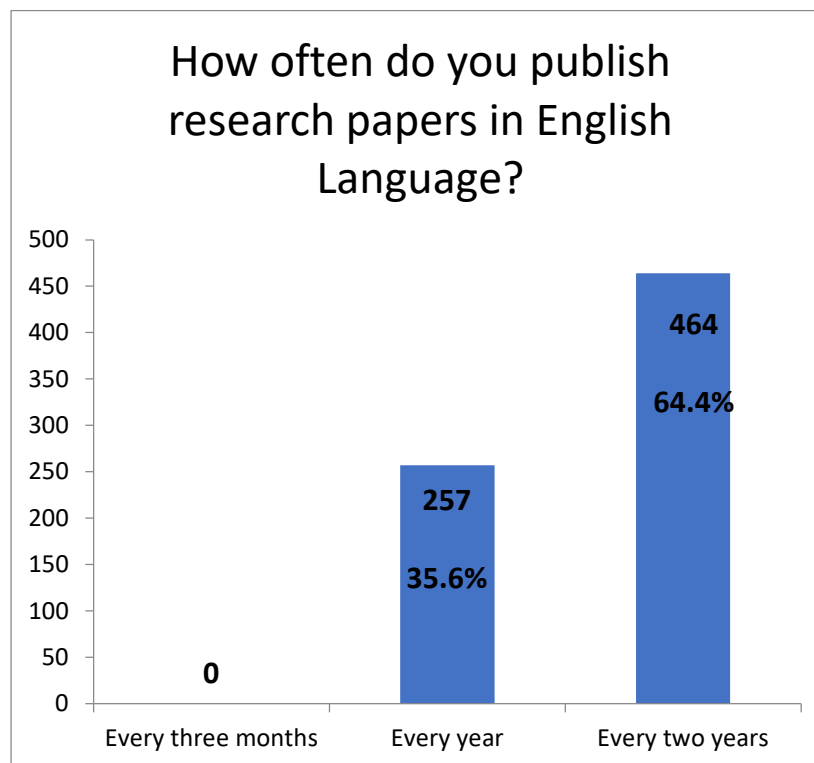


Figure 2 Frequent Usage of English Language in Research Publication

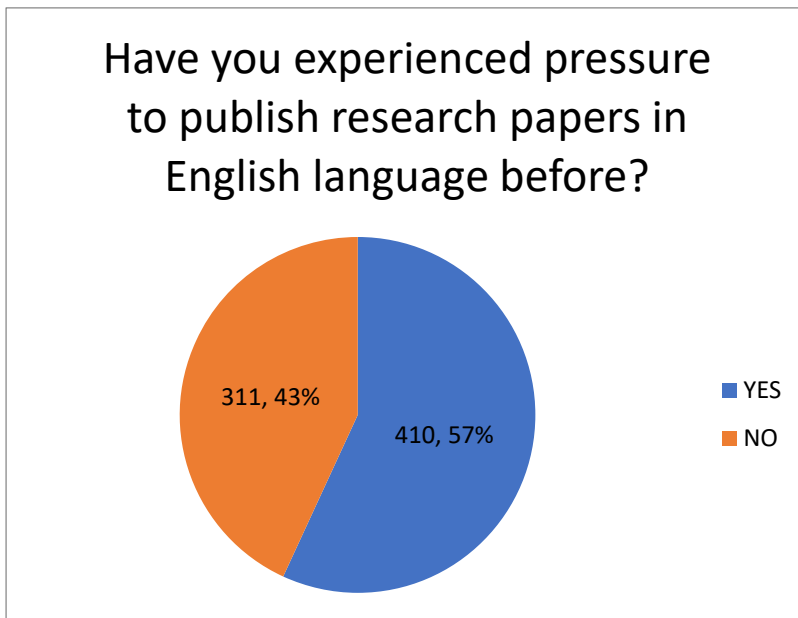


Figure 3 Have you experienced pressure to publish research papers in English language before?

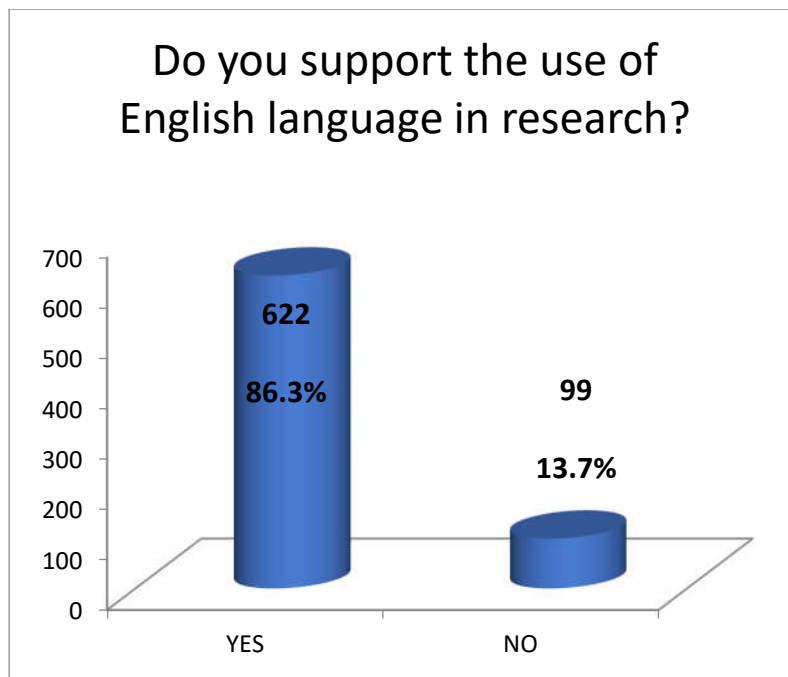


Figure 4 Do you support the use of English language in research?

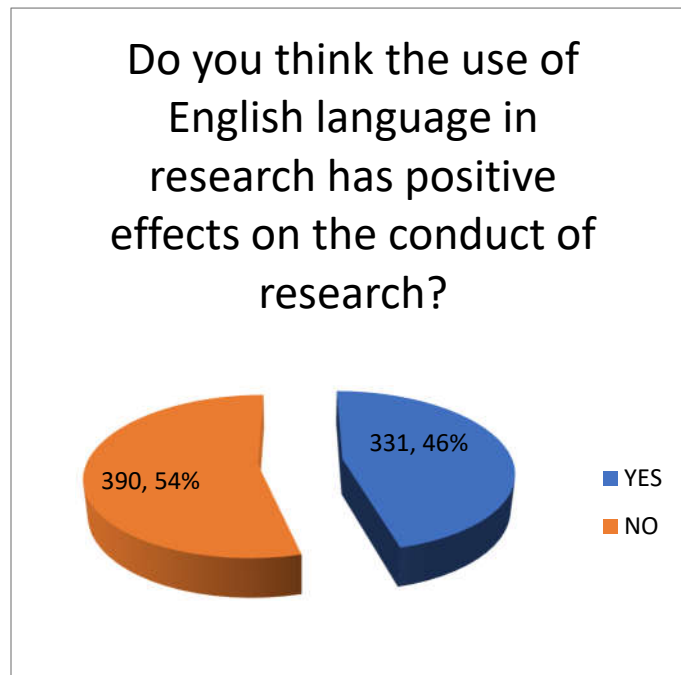


Figure 5 Do you think the use of English language in research has positive effects on the conduct of research?

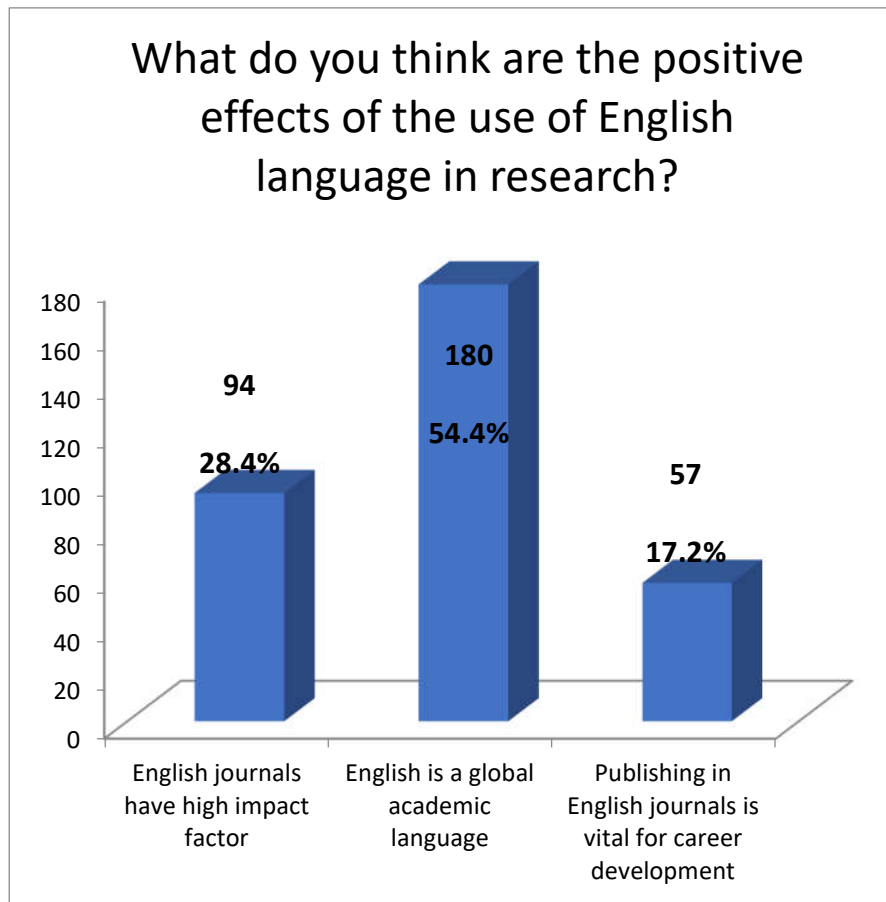


Figure 6 What do you think are the positive effects of the use of English language in research?

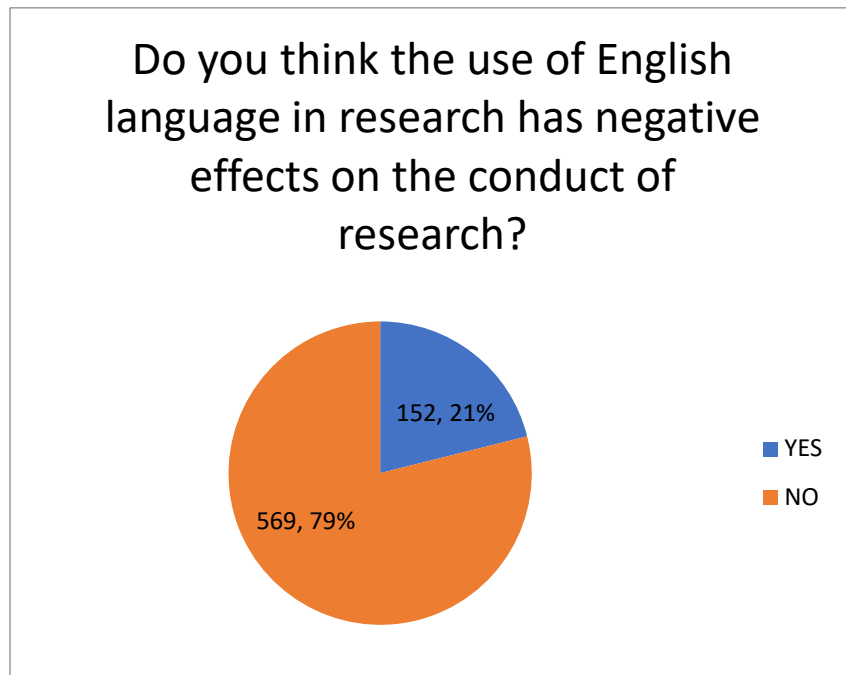


Figure 7 Do you think the use of English language in research has negative effects on the conduct of research?

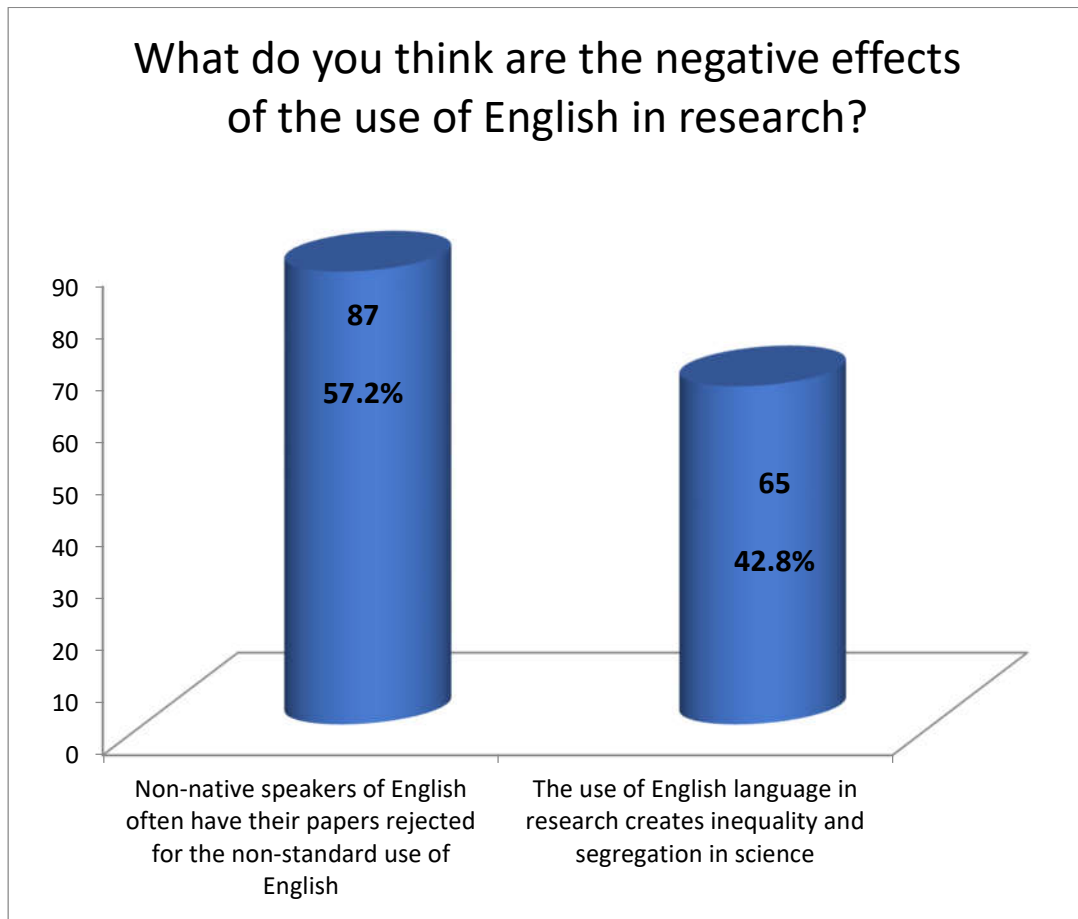
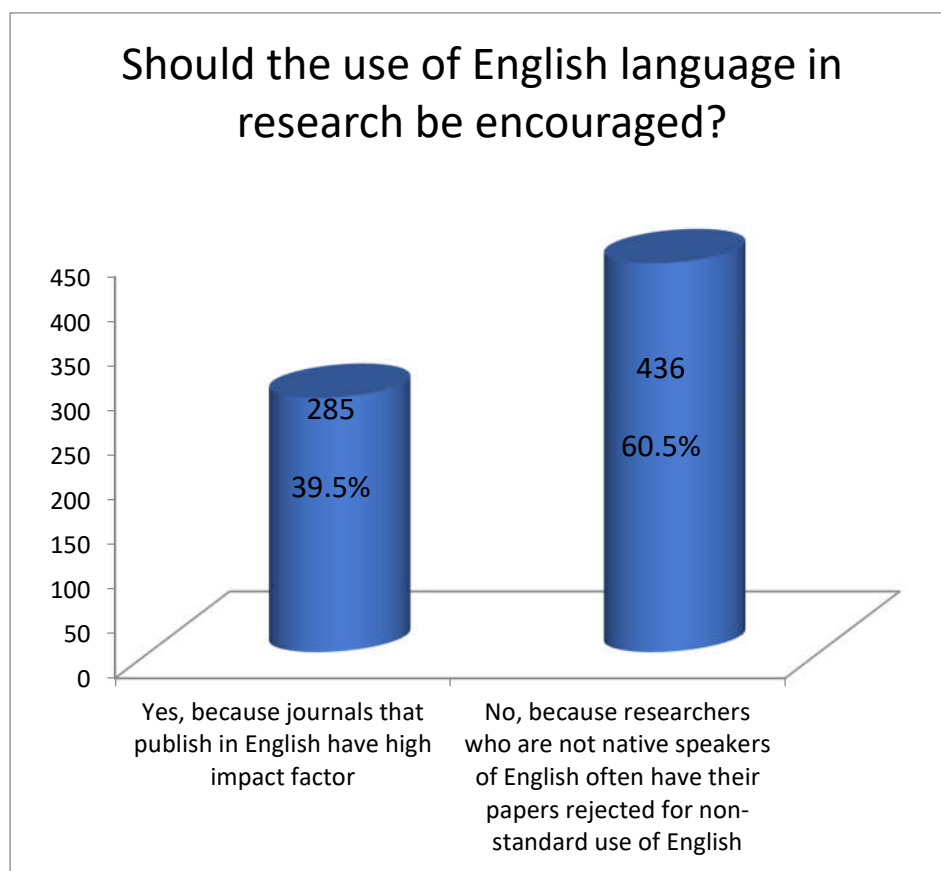


Figure 8 What do you think are the negative effects of the use of English language in research?



It was found that 721 respondents representing 100% of the respondents confirmed that they publish research papers in English language.

It was also established that 464 respondents consisting 64.4% of the respondents admitted that they publish research papers in English language every two years, and 257 of them representing 35.6 % of the respondents said that they publish research papers in English language every year.

Further, the study recorded that 410 respondents representing 57% of the respondents confirmed that they have experienced pressure to publish research papers in English language before, and 311 of them representing 43% of the respondents said that they have never experienced pressure to publish research papers in English language.

In addition, it came to the fore that 622 respondents representing 86.3% of the respondents admitted that they support the use of English language in research, and 99 of them consisting 13.7% of the respondents said that they do not support the use of English language in research.

Besides, the study revealed that 331 respondents representing 46% of the respondents said that they think that the use of English language in research has positive effects on the conduct of research. However, 390 of them representing 54% of the respondents said that they do not think that the use of English language in research has positive effects on the conduct of research.

Moreover, it was observed that 180 respondents representing 54.4% of the respondents chose English being a global academic language as the positive effects of the use of English language in research, 94 of them representing 28.4% of the respondents selected English journals having high impact factor as being the positive effects of the use of English language in research while 57 of them representing 17.2% of the respondents picked English journals being vital for career development as the positive effects of the use of English language in research.

Again, the study brought to light that 569 respondents representing 79% of the respondents argued that they think that the use of English language in research has negative effects on the conduct of research. 152 of them representing 21% of the respondents however said that they believe that the use of English language in research has negative effects on the conduct of research.

It was as well established that 87 respondents representing 57% of the respondents picked non-native speakers of English often have their papers rejected for the non-standard use of English as being the negative effects of the use of English in research, and 65 of them representing 42.8% of the respondents chose the use of English language in research creates inequality and segregation in science as the negative effects of the use of English in research.

Finally, it was found that 436 respondents representing 60.5% of the respondents admitted that they do not want the use of English language in research to be encouraged because researchers who are not native speakers of English often have their papers rejected for the non-standard use of English. However, 285 of them representing 39.5% of the respondents said that they want the use of English language in research to be encouraged because journals that publish in English have high impact factor.

The revelation that 100% of the respondents said that they publish research papers in English language shows beyond that English journals are becoming increasingly popular among researchers. It also goes to confirm that researchers do not normally publish research papers in non-English journals.

Secondly, the score of 64.4% of the respondents that admitted that they publish research papers in English language every two years, while 35.6% of them that confirmed that they publish research papers in English every year again underscores the increasingly popularity of English journals among researchers.

In addition, the 57% of the respondents that confirmed that they have experienced pressure to publish research papers in English language before gives credence to the assertion by Kumju that the reason non-native English researchers are compelled to use English at a cost of extra time and effort is essentially linked to their regular attempts to be recognized as having internationally compatible quality and to gain the highest possible reputation (Kumju, 2005). The score of 43% of the respondents that said that they have never experienced pressure to publish research papers in English language affirms that some researchers remain unfazed by the increasing popularity of English journals among researchers.

Furthermore, the 86.3% of the respondents that admitted that they support the use of English language in research reaffirms the increasing popularity of English journals among researchers. However, one may argue that this does not mean that the use of other languages in research should be discouraged. The fact that English has become a global academic language cannot be challenged. Nevertheless, if all researchers choose to publish research papers only in English, a significant proportion of the global population of about 7.674 billion who cannot read and write English will be disadvantaged.

Also, the score of 13.7% of the respondents that said that they do not support the use of English language in research drums home the desire of some researchers to publish in other languages notwithstanding the increasing popularity of the use of English language in research. Though their task seems daunting, they need to be supported. Their move is a step in the right direction. This is because as said before a significant number of the global population of roughly 7.674 billion who cannot read and write English stand to lose if all researchers choose to publish research papers only in English.

Moreover, the realisation that 54% of the respondents said that they do not think that the use of English language in research has positive effects on the conduct of research seems unfair. This is because the positives of the use of English language in research far outweigh the negatives. Anyway, it may be that those respondents cannot communicate very well in English and that might have affected their ability to be objective. But like it or not, the use of English language in research will always remain popular among researchers.

Besides, the fact that 54.4% of the respondents chose English as being a global academic language as the positive effects of the use of English language in research might encourage more and more academics (lecturers) and postgraduate students to publish in English journals. However, it may mean nothing at all for non-native English research authors who are confronted with incessant rejection of their research papers for the non-standard use of English.

Again, the 79% of the respondents that contended that they think that the use of English language in research has negative effects on the conduct of research supports the position of Bortolus (2012) that the biggest issue confronting non-native English authors who want to publish in English journals is the incessant rejection of their papers because of the non-standard use of English. It further resonates with the contention of studies that in local communities of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) countries, scientific reasoning is hampered, especially in higher education since learning hinges on cultural attitude acquired from the native language spoken by the students, and science becomes alien to their own experiences (Gulbranden et al, 2002; Lee et al, 2007; de Vasconcelos Hage, 2006).

What is more, the score of 57% of the respondents that picked non-native speakers of English often have their papers rejected for the non-standard use of English as being the negative effects of the use of English in research collaborates the claim by Bortolus (2012) that the biggest issue confronting non-native English authors who want to publish in English journals is the incessant rejection of their papers because of the non-standard use of English.

What is more, the 60.5% of the respondents that admitted that they do not want the use of English language in research to be encouraged because researchers who are not native speakers of English often have their papers rejected for the non-standard use of English is a wake-up call for English journals. They must put their act together by doing two things: First and foremost, they should engage experts to perfect the research papers of non-native English authors for publishing. Secondly, they should try to give non-native English authors second chance to perfect their papers and resubmit them for publishing.

5. Conclusion

The study determined the good and the bad of use of English language in research. It was observed that most of the respondents (i.e., 100%) publish research papers in English language. Further, it was revealed that most of the respondents confirmed that

they publish research papers in English language every two years; a few of them (i.e., 35.6%) said that they publish research papers in English language every year.

Besides, it came to the fore that most of the respondents (i.e., 64.4%) confirmed that they have experienced pressure to publish research papers in English language before. In addition, it was realised that most of the respondents (i.e., 86.3%) admitted that they support the use of English language in research. However, a few of them (i.e., 13.7%) said that they do not support the use of English language in research.

In addition, it was found that most of the respondents (i.e., 54%) said that they do not think that the use of English language in research has positive effects on the conduct of research.

What is more, the study recorded that most of the respondents (i.e., 79%) think that the use of English language in research has negative effects on the conduct of research. It was as well established that most of the respondents chose non-native speakers of English often have their papers rejected for the non-standard use of English as being the negative effects of the use of English in research.

Lastly, it was found that most of the respondents (i.e., 60.5%) admitted that they do not want the use of English language in research to be encouraged because researchers who are not native speakers of English often have their papers rejected for the non-standard use of English, and just a few of them (i.e., 39.5%) said that they want the use of English language in research to be encouraged because journals that publish in English have high impact factor.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Researchers should be allowed to publish in languages that they are fully competent in.
2. English journals must have a quota system for non-native English-speaking authors. They should spell out clearly the number of papers from non-native English-speaking authors that they would like to publish quarterly or yearly.
3. Non-native English-speaking authors should also endeavour to learn to perfect their English.

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