# Iranian TEFL Postgraduate Students' Perceptions of the Essential Requirements of Publishing RAs and Their Challenges

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**Abstract**

Publishing a research article (RA) is highly significant to postgraduate TEFL students worldwide, particularly for doctorate students in Iran in order to graduate. Meeting the demands of publishing can be tremendously challenging to postgraduate students. In this study, Iranian postgraduate TEFL students' perceptions of the essentials of publishing their RAs were investigated through a questionnaire given to 30 Ph.D. students and M.A. graduates. Besides, the researchers conducted a focus group interview among 12 of the participants to seek concerns and challenges they face during the process of publishing their RAs. The results of the data analysis of the questionnaire indicated a rather high perception towards the essentials required for publishing a RA. However, the results of the analysis of the interview revealed multifaceted challenges students practically face while publishing their RAs, which suggests pertinent implications to practitioners to deal effectively with students' challenges in publication.

*Key words:* Perception, TEFL Postgraduate students, Research article publishing

## 1. Introduction

Research is primarily looking for facts to progress knowledge which involves analogy and studying of information to progress how a person understands phenomena being studied (Bahadori, Momeni, Ravangard, Yaghoubi, Alimohammadzadeh, Teymourzadeh, & Tavana 2015). It involves collecting, analyzing, interpreting data as well as assessment procedures which are administrated in an organized manner so as to find solutions to any problem (Rezaei & Miandashti, 2013).

RA writing serves as a popular genre in academic writing (AW) and the necessity to establish a coherent RA so that it can be successfully published is significantly important in the academic genre. Writing for publication is an outstanding privilege that should be approached in innovative ways of thinking which leads to an opportunity to share original ideas and thoughts, take a role, and report the findings properly based on foundational knowledge in a particular area (Klein, 2008). Considering that reputable journals will only publish high-quality articles with a sound contribution to the realm of knowledge and adhering to the standard academic writing as well as publishing conventions, getting their articles published in such journals would strongly indicate these postgraduate students' academic writing powers. Publishing a RA is also significant for postgraduate students since it construes their level of academic knowledge and their ability to administer and expand new ideas through the academic venue (Anderson, Day, & MacLaughlin, 2006).

Postgraduate students usually bring their assumptions, perceptions, and beliefs about what a writing course should offer them and in what way. Perception is defined as "the process by which people select, organize, interpret, retrieve and respond to the information from the world around them." (Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn, 2003, p.2). Students' perceptions regarding essential

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conventions in publishable RAs are a major concern (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Students need to understand submitting for academic journals is a highly competitive activity, and it is important to understand the mechanisms of writing and publishing professionally.

Not only do TEFL postgraduate students face difficulties and stress for their RAs due to their level of language competency known as language conventions (Al Fadda, 2012; Olivas & Li, 2006; Tien, 2013) but also for their insufficient knowledge of all the conventions and norms while publishing them which are construed as macro level considerations. The problems dealing with writing processes and strategies encountered with academic students may count only 50 percent of the story. The issues related to publication conventions, such as being aware of what journals are looking for, the expectations of reviewers and editors, knowing common reasons for rejection of articles, and following strategies in order to find the 'market' mainly seem to be of utmost importance even if the writing itself is flawless (Zamel, 1983). It then deems crucial to deal with postgraduate publishing essentials.

There is still a more general image to consider in order for a RA to be successfully published. There seems to be some challenges in the submission process besides successful preparation of manuscript that often lead to rejection of RAs. Being aware of these challenges and appropriately addressing them will increase postgraduate students' chances of having their RA published and also boost their research profile and career progression.

To understand any potential problem in dissertation or article writing, studies, utilizing interviews and questionnaires, have been broadly conducted. These studies have illustrated what non-English speaking writers perceived as difficult, as well as using appropriate strategies of learning and writing in order to overcome their difficulties (e.g., Dong, 1998; Flowerdew, 1999; López-Cózar, Priede, & Benito, 2013). Most of these studies have focused on the processes and perceptions of postgraduate students, masters, and doctorates concerning article writing (Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Castelló & Iñesta, 2012; Castelló, Iñesta, & Monereo, 2009; Dysthe, Samara, & Westrheim, 2006).

Furthermore, despite an abundance of studies conducted in various contexts with different focuses on academic writing and research article writing (RAW), conventions of publishing issues as well as academic students' perceptions and problems in this regard have rarely been taken into account. In addition, there have been few studies, if any, in non-native environments or EFL contexts, such as Iran where all Ph.D. students are dependent on research article publication (RAP) in order to graduate besides successful passing of the courses. Thus, making attempt to fill the gap, the present study was undertaken with two objectives of analyzing EFL M.A. graduates and Ph. D. students' perceptions on the essentials of RA publishing on one hand and exploring challenges they have in publishing their RAs on the other. Accordingly, the researchers posed the following research questions:

**Research Question One**: What are Iranian TEFL postgraduate students' perceptions of the essential requirements of publishing their RAs?

**Research Question Two:** What challenges do Iranian TEFL postgraduate students have in publishing their RAs?

## 2. Literature Review

Previous research studies have all supported TEFL postgraduate students' scant experience to publish their RAs and their difficulties in research writing. Nolan and Rocco (2009), for example, pointed that postgraduate students generally complained since they did not fully understand how to write for publication and struggled in attaining the quality which professional journals urged. In addition, findings of a study conducted by Catterall, Ross, Aitchison, and Burgin (2011) claimed that writing a RA is disappointing as confirmed by the participants' responses which considered writing an article for a journal so challenging subsequent to doctoral thesis writing. The main factors related to the difficulties in writing articles for journals or writing for publication are time limits, not being proficient in language skills, supervisors' varied expertise, inadequate learning in pre-doctoral

courses, and the concern for bad judgment of an article (Catterall et al., 2011; Jalongo, Boyer, & Ebbeck, 2014; Tahaineh, 2010).

Proliferate demand of scholarly writing urges the fact that postgraduate students need to be highly assisted so as to progress their ability to write scholarly for publication. As Jalongo et al. (2014) in their study stated, an instruction or a course that is focused on scholarly writing for publication is needed where students could experience plenty of writing and get effective feedback on what they write. Catterall et al. (2011) also consider workshops or training how to write scholarly as a great institutional writing assistance for postgraduate students. Concerning importance of workshops for scholarly writing, Rosales, Moloney, and Badenhorst (2012) studied the pedagogy of "Thinking Creatively about Research" workshop and surveyed its usefulness taken from students' perceptions on research and writing. Their study found that the students could improve the output of their writing, be more confident and self-identified as a writer by attending the workshop. Moreover, Swales and Lindemann (2002) reported the result of teaching international graduate students of writing literature review as a part of research article which showed that the participants, who were helped in writing the literature review of their small-scale research, had well written literature reviews.

So far numerous quantitative and qualitative studies have focused on different aspects of students' RPW, experiences, and perceptions (Bitcherner & Basturkman, 2006; Castelló & Iñesta, 2012; Harrison & Whalley, 2008; Hasrati & Tavakoli, 2016; Kauur & Shakila, 2007; McGinty, Lie, & Saeidi, 2010; Parker &Martin, 2010; Todd, Bannister, & Clegg, 2004; Todd, Galinsky, & Bodenhausen 2012). As research literature indicates, previous studies were conducted in various contexts with different focuses on academic writing and RAW which have rarely taken into account research on the conventions of publishing issues as well as academic students' perceptions and problems in this regard.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Participants

The study consisted of 30 TEFL M.A. graduates and Ph.D. students, chosen from among 57 (20 out of 30 Ph.D. students at their first year and 10 out of 27 M.A. recent graduates), based on purposive sampling of criterion type (Dornyei, 2007), from Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch, Iran. The criteria explained the selection of the participants, first having the same teachers for AW and research methods courses, writing at least one RA either in experimental or descriptive method, as commonly practiced in Iranian universities, and second having the supervisor from the same university for the purpose of consistency in receiving the same type of instruction and practice in RA writing. The most important criterion, however, was their publication status. None of the participants had a RA published either for getting rejection from journals or not daring to submit to journals, particularly high-ranking ones. The age range for participants was 25- 40, with their language background of Turkish and Persian, including both genders (male=10, female=20). There were 12 participants for focus group interview (seven Ph.D. students and five M.A. graduates) who had passed three research methods (RMs) courses (one in the M.A. and two in the Ph.D. programs) and two AW courses (one at M.A. program and one at Ph.D. program).

### 3.2. Materials and Instruments

The initial instrument utilized in this study was a questionnaire designed by the researchers, containing 25 questions, which aimed at investigating the participants' perceptions of the essentials of RA publishing. The questions mainly involved macro level considerations dealing with publication world and target journals which all postgraduate students are required to know besides writing a well-organized RA in order to have them successfully published. Such considerations were finding an appropriate journal to submit articles, scientific information about the target journals, guidelines set by the candidate journals, and checking the journals' guidelines (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was formed in five- point Likert scale (i.e., completely Essential, Mostly Essential, Somewhat Essential, Hardly Essential, Not Essential). The internal reliability of the questionnaire measured by Cronbach Alpha was 0.75.

The second instrument was a focus group interview with five questions designed by the researchers to find out the challenges of the participants in publication. Krueger's (2002) guidelines in terms of the structural characteristics of focus group interview concerning participants, environment, moderator, analysis, and reporting were followed. The interview was a semi-structured one with open-ended questions so that additional questions or ideas can be easily raised during the interview (Cresswell, 2012). The open-ended questions helped the interviewee answer in detail and there was no bias resulting from responses suggested by individuals. The questions were based on general issues of demanding aspects of problems outlined by editors and their compatibility with RA writing courses as well as possible obstacles for successful publication or not submitting a RA (see Appendix B). The content validity of the interview questions was determined through expert views. Two university professors, who were competent in teaching writing courses and research methods courses and supervising M.A. and Ph.D. candidates for years, were consulted.

*3.3. Procedure*

Two stages were followed as the procedure of the study. The first stage was related to investigating participants' perceptions on the essentials of macro level considerations in publishing their RAs, utilizing a questionnaire. All 25 questions within the questionnaire were checked for their internal reliability. Then, the questionnaire was emailed to M.A. graduates to be answered as they had been graduated and the researchers did not have access to them in person. All the participants replied the email positively attaching the questionnaire. However, Ph.D. students got them in person as they had not graduated and were kindly asked to answer and bring them back a week later.

The second stage was a focus group interview, a qualitative data collection approach where people can easily express the information about themselves (Best & Kahn, 2006), was run on 12 of the participants to get more information on problems they face while publishing their RAs. Focus group interview was preferred since it has the format of a question and answer (Krueger & Casey, 2000) where the researcher is actively inspiring and simultaneously attending to the group interaction (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999). According to Dornyei (2007), the number of participants in focus group interviews are usually 6-12.

The questions were all posed in one single session after an introduction about the topic of the interview and the purpose for the study, which was a part of the study for a Ph.D. thesis. Five open-ended questions were asked in order to get plenty of ideas on any potential problems the participants had already come up with. The interview lasted almost an hour and a half and was conducted in an empty room at university. The interview session conducted in English was recorded and transcribed which compiled total words of 1175.

To make the atmosphere friendly, certain helpful factors could encourage the participants to be honest while responding. The first was the shared experiences of being involved in conducting research, writing, and publishing RAs between the interviewer (one of the researchers) and the respondents. Second, all the participants were also from the same university.

## 4. Results

*4.1. Perceptions: The Results of the Questionnaire*

A questionnaire was distributed to the participants in the form of a five-point Likert scale to get participants' perception on the essentials of RA publishing. The reliability was measured by Cronbach Alpha (alpha = .75>p= .05). The descriptive statistics for the participants' perceptions in the questionnaire, being analyzed quantitatively, are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Perceptions of the Participants Concerning Essentials of Research Article Publishing

| | |
|---|---|
| N Valid 30 | |
| Missing 0 | |
| Mean 85.53 | |
| Std. Deviation 5.15 | |
| Minimum 76.00 | |
| Maximum 94.00 | |
| Percentage 68 | |

Taking the descriptive statistics of the questionnaire into account (M= 85.53, Std. = 5.15, Min= 76, and Max= 94) as displayed in Table 1, the participants seem to have high perceptions, (i.e., they have been exposed to the essential requirements in terms of research article publishing since they had received some information about them in their academic courses.), 68 percent. Thus, the response to the first research question is that their perceptions seem to be rather high. The results are also displayed in Figure 1.
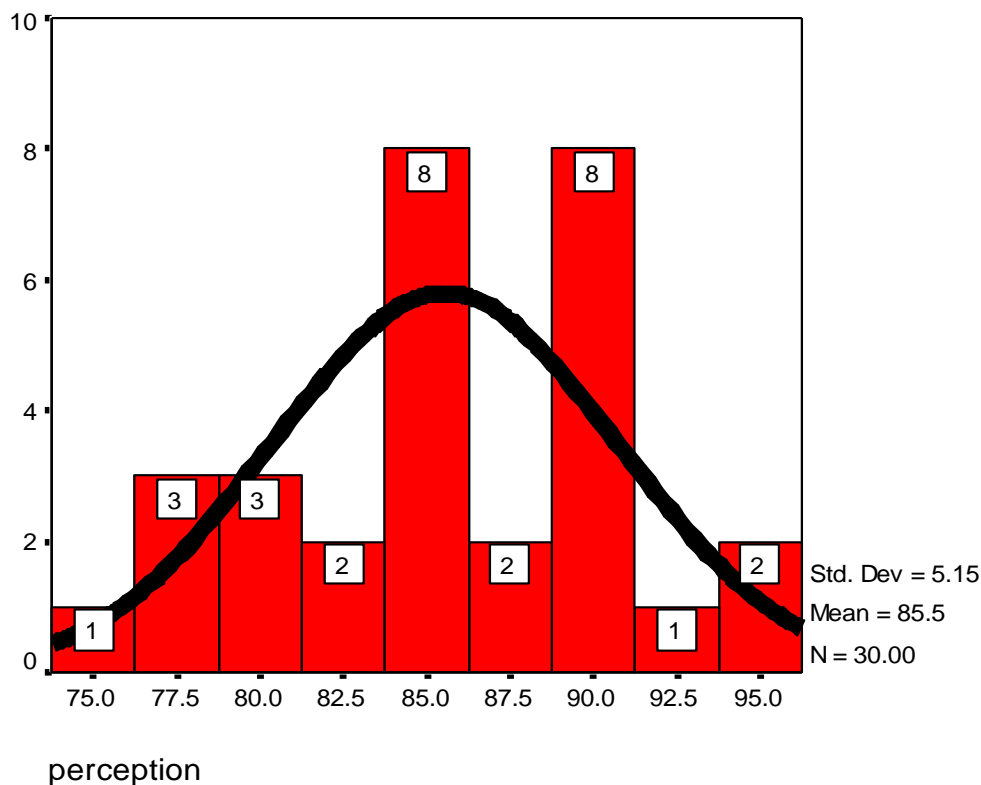


Figure 1: The Participants' Perceptions on Essentials of Macro Level Conventions in RA Publishing

*4.2. Challenges: Data Analysis of the Focus Group Interview*

Having read the completed interview transcripts over and over, the researchers examined how some postgraduate Iranian TEFL students interpret the challenges and problems while publishing their RAs. Through coding the transcribed data, using thematic analysis, a qualitative analytic method serving as an umbrella term for a variety of different approaches, rather than a singular method, explained by Braun and Clarke (2006), as identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data was employed. Such an analysis involves seeking to identify themes and coding categories that result from an examination of the data rather than being already ascertained and exerted on the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In so doing, the following themes of (a) reasons for rejection of students' research articles; (b) obstacles for no submission; (c) main problems of successful publishing; (d) problems

regarding journal finding; and (e) compatibility of already learnt materials with examiners' comments came out. All the related data are statistically shown in Tables 2 to 7. Data taken from the analysis of the transcribed responses to the first question of the interview, which dealt with the most frequently counted reasons for rejection of research articles by examiners, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: The Reasons for Rejection of Research Articles by Reviewers

| Theme: Reasons for rejection |
|---|
| Sub-theme Frequencuy and Percentage |
| Irrelevancy of the article's subject within the interest of journal 3 (25%) |
| Lack of similarity between article's format and style with those of the journal 5 (41.7%) |
| Lack of adequate sources and its low quality stating previous works 1 (8.3%) |
| Lack of statement of new ideas concerning the article's subject 2 (16.7%) |
| Lack of proper theoretical framework to do the research 2 (16.7%) |

According to Table 2, some aspects of managing research articles at the macro level were mentioned by the participants. The main reasons, however, have been "lack of similarity between article's format and style with those of the journal" (41.7%) and "irrelevancy of the article's subject within the interest of journal" (25%). A participant said:

"The only answer I received from the journal to which I had send my article was that the topic of my article was not within their scope of study"(ID: 5).

Data taken from the analysis of the transcribed responses to the second question, which dealt with any obstacle in case there was no submission to any journal, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Obstacles for not submitting any Article to Journals

| Theme: Obstacles for no submission |
|---|
| Sub-theme Frequencuy and Percentage Long and time-consuming process of achieving approval of a good journal 9 (74.94%) Change of the fate for some journals into black list in which they had already published their article |
| 5 (41.7%) |
| Lack of requisite to have an article published on behalf of the teacher 3 (25%) Lack of any special advantage or quality after publishing articles 3 (25%) Having financial problems 3 (25%) |

As shown in Table 3, the two main obstacles while submitting any research article are "long process of achieving approval" (74.94%) and "having unpleasant experience of turning the journal into black list" (41.7%). One participant said:

"Despite financial challenges, I had published an article taken from my M.A thesis. However, the journal had been in black list a year later when I wanted to use it as a source for my resume"(ID: 9).

Data taken from the analysis of the transcribed responses to the third question, which dealt with any problem in contributing to successful publication of a research article, are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Problems Concerning Successful Publishing of the Research Articles

| Theme: Main problems of successful publishing |
|---|
| Sub-theme Frequencuy and Percentage Limited ability to transfer main ideas and clarify the aim of the study 3 (25%) |
| Lack of cohesion in methodology 2 (16.7%) Finding updated issues (new sources of information) and writing a consistent article |
| 6 (49.92%) |
| Insufficient mentioning of valid sources in justifying the findings 3 (25%) |
| Not fulfilling all the requirements of the intended journal 4 (33.3%) |

According to Table 4, the main problem concerning successful publishing of the research articles was "finding updated issues and writing a consistent article" (49.92%). In this regard, one participant said:

"The up-to-date issues are of high importance to please the reviewers. The problem you investigate must be of state-of-the-art value. Writing organized literature and basing your article on well-known

figures is another problem. I have been rejected for shoddy methodology and not writing academically" (ID: 6).

Data taken from the analysis of the transcribed responses to the fourth question, which dealt with problems regarding journal finding, validity check, and having access to them, are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Problems Regarding Journal Finding, Validity Check, and Having Access to them

| Theme:Problems regarding journal finding |
| --- |
| Sub-theme Frequencuy and Percentage<br>High expenses of valid and high-quality journals 4 (33.3%)<br>Lack of access to valid journals and sites particularly in our country because of political issues 6 (49.92%)<br>Not finding relevant journals and challenging process of receiving approval from them 5 (41.7%) Doubting the journal's area of interest compared to one's article 4 (33.3%)<br>Insufficient experience of undertaking appropriate process of sending an article to any particular journal 6 (49.92%) |

According to Table 5, the most important problems regarding journals were equally "lack of access to valid and high-quality journals particularly in our country because of political issues, not finding relevant journals and the challenging process of receiving approval from them", and "insufficient experience of undertaking appropriate process of sending an article to any particular journal" (49.92%). Regarding finding relevant journals, one participant said:

"Finding a relevant journal and recognizing the fake ones from reliable ones is a difficult job which sometimes needs a lot of experience. Plus, most of the reliable journals are difficult to approach in Iran because of sanctions and some political issues" (ID: 11).

Data taken from the analysis of the transcribed responses to the fifth interview question, which dealt with the level of compatibility between the problems mentioned by reviewers for the rejection of articles and what postgraduate students had learned in their academic courses related to research article writing, are presented in Table 6 and 7.

Table 6: Compatibility between the Problems Mentioned by reviewers and What They Had Learned in Research Article Writing Courses

| Responses Frequency Percent |
| --- |
| Yes 3 25 |
| No 9 75 |

As shown in Table 6, three participants, 25 % of all, found the problems mentioned by reviewers for the rejection of articles compatible with what they had learned in their academic courses related to research article writing whereas the other nine, 75 %, did not.

Table 7: The Reasons Why the Problems Mentioned by Examiners were/were not compatible with the Materials learnt in Research Article Writing courses

| Theme: Compatibility of already learnt materials with reviewers' comments |
|---|
| Sub-theme Frequencuy and Percentage There is no compatibility between the quality of the written article and that of journal 6 (49.92%) |
| There is no compatibility between the materials covered and rules of journals 7 (58.38%) |
| Practical experience of research paper writing in academic courses but some important parts of article are omitted 8 (66.72%) Common problems have been covered throughout the academic course concerning writing as well as publishing a research article 4 (33.3%) |
| The materials have been covered theoretically (i.e., explained by teachers and read by learners) and publishing problems have not been covered 5 (41.7%) |

According to Table 7, the main reason for the inefficiency of academic writing courses presented at university was "practical experiencing of material within academic courses" (66.72%). One participant said:

"The points mentioned by reviewers concerning the writing of a research article are usually the technical problems which are exactly what we have learned in academic courses. To mention a few, they mostly consider problems related to novelty and originality of the ideas, plagiarism avoidance or compatibility of the content and reference writing to APA style, which are all mentioned in academic writing courses " (ID: 4).

On the other hand, the most striking point mentioned by those who were dissatisfied with academic writing courses was that "the materials had been covered theoretically while publishing problems had not been covered". One participant stated:

"There are some mismatches between what we have learned and the rules stated by the journal"(ID: 10).

## 5. Discussion

The present study investigated the requirements particular to the publishing of RAs and looked into how postgraduate Iranian TEFL students perceived them and what challenges they mostly encountered while publishing their RAs.

The findings indicated rather high percentage of perception on the essentials of RA publishing. That is, participants were successful in developing ideas and beliefs about the essential requirements for publication and had a grasp of theoretical conventions regarding publishing based on what they theoretically covered in research or academic writing courses. On the part of the participants this highlights successful grasp of guidelines for authors, the topic of the article to be compatible with the journal's area of publication, consultation with the teacher or the supervisor while finding appropriate journals, and documentation in RAs, so on and so forth. Despite their high perception on all requirements of publishing RAs, they had not succeeded to publish any of their RAs in an outstanding journal. This might be due to the fact that they assume they know them well but in practice they do not. For example, item 10 in the questionnaire refers to the professional writing of the cover letter but practically being involved in writing a cover letter needs be done to be able to write the cover letter professionally. Thus, they need to go beyond 'knowing' what is right or wrong and focus on 'what is expected' by practically making their RAs as fruitful as possible in terms of all language conventions within RAW genre, as well as macro level considerations including all publishing conventions and norms while submitting them to pertinent journals. In so doing, they can experience the challenges practically and develop their ability in both writing and publishing their RAs. As Wegner (2010) states, postgraduate students need a "regimen of competence" for the successful production of publishable RAs and such regimen of competence needs to be practiced in depth in order to be soaked by all students at postgraduate levels.

The study also revealed Iranian TEFL postgraduate students' significant barriers and challenges which impede publications, some of which already mentioned by other investigators (Borg, 2009;

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Casanave & Hubbard, 1992; Nassaji, 2012) such as lack of adequate facilities, skills, and personal interest. Others include limited resources such as funds and facilities and logistical difficulties. Based on interview results, the role of the teacher, who really serves as the basis for any great RA, needs to be highlighted here. Concerning teachers' roles, as Al Khairy's (2013) states, instructors should make great efforts to identify current teaching methods that might encourage students to actively take part in RAW and obtain high language and academic proficiency on one hand and help them publish their articles in good journals on the other. Positive role models and sufficient professional consultation are essential to postgraduate students, and if they are not supported adequately, they might face serious frustrations. It would be more logical to believe that the best teachers would be experienced researchers with abundant publication records. This remark was in line with the observation of Williams (2013) on the requirement for new researchers to have a supervisor who can be a great guide throughout the process of research and article publishing. Therefore, most research endeavors by postgraduate students will never fully succeed unless there exists great deal of cooperation between two essential parties including teachers and students.

Sometimes, the fact that some postgraduate students avoid submitting their RAs affects the research process negatively. It is evident that the main obstacle is not having the opportunity to perform research as they were not involved in any research activities in the first place. They might have also felt they had nothing new to offer as a publication. This was in harmony with the findings considered by Griffin and Hindocha (2011) who stated that postgraduate students need to have a positive attitude towards publishing, welcome education in RA writing, and be encouraged to involve in scholarly active research activities and publishing.

The perceptions and attitudes of postgraduate students have substantial impact on their success (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Parker & Martin, 2010). However, when we consider the high priority constructs within the research world, there appears to be a mismatch. While the postgraduate students primarily focus on the significance of language conventions while writing their research articles, publishing requirements seem to bear higher priority. Postgraduate students encounter problems mostly in understanding and applying the concept of the research while publishing their research articles. Postgraduate students do not fully grasp what really counts in research article publishing as the main enterprise; most of them are not able to sift through high quality journals and fulfill their expectations. As Tahaineh (2010) emphasizes, RA writing and having the experience of publishing need to be a practical course and an integral part of the curriculum in the universities in graduate and postgraduate programs so that postgraduate students can achieve the desired objective of not only writing fruitful research articles but also publishing them successfully in highly demanding journals.

Furthermore, target journal selection really matters because some novice researchers may wrongly publish their articles in open-access low quality predatory journals. Professors and other researchers need to raise the novice researchers' consciousness of the presence of such journals and how they should avoid them. The low-quality articles have drastic output. However, novice researchers (i.e., students here) intentionally publish their articles there because these journals just receive money, do not usually peer review to provide constructive feedback, and give students the false impression that they have pages of publications. Publishing articles in these journals not only endangers the scientific progress by misleading some novices to read and cite low quality articles, but also gives the inexperienced student researcher the false confidence that they have published several articles. This is in line with findings of Beall (2012) who has brought up the subject of predatory publishing, where requisites are made for authors to submit an article with a very rapid result but they have to pay to publish their articles. Similarly, Bruce and Stoodley (2013) considered a set of common characteristics through looking at seven e-mail solicitations by such publishers, including: (a) appeal to legitimacy with ISSN (International Standard Serial Number) / indexes, (b) mention of peer review, (c) inner circle country affiliation (e.g., the United States, Canada, or United Kingdom), (d) multidisciplinary scope, and (e) a very fast turnaround. They also stated many cautionary red flags in the e-mail messages concerning vague editorial roles and affiliations, language errors, flattery, and open invitations to become a reviewer.

Postgraduate students need not to rush in submitting their RAs, but they need to select an appropriate journal and closely follow all its guidelines including style conventions and mechanics, content and structure, scope and purpose, paper types and research designs, reviewing and revision process, acceptance rates, response times, and quality in academic writing for publication.

The present research has served novelty in analyzing the postgraduate students' perceptions on RA publishing rather than solely its writing, which states the significance of publishing world and any potential obstacle within it. However, despite the high perception of postgraduate students on the essentials of publishing RAs, the questionnaires by themselves do not seem adequate to gain an insight into the complex and multifaceted nature of RA publication. The focus group interview conducted in this study to tackle publishing problems postgraduate students practically encounter while publishing their RAs validated the questionnaire.

No work can be finalized without qualifying the results in light of limitations of the study. This study focused on conventions of publication (i.e., macro-level considerations), while AW courses need to go beyond and train the students in genre of RA writing with certain moves and steps, which is beyond the scope of this research and awaits further research. Moreover, micro level considerations within a RA, including how to write RAs which fully meet linguistic conventions can be further researched. Finally, a close examination of perceptions of native students and Iranian postgraduate students on conventions of RA publication might reveal different problematic concerns related to cultural backgrounds, especially regarding educational systems.

## 6. Conclusion and Implications

Little attention to the macro level considerations while publishing a RA can cause serious problems for postgraduate students in EFL contexts and they are the main sources of challenges. Students need to develop not only the perception of some key components of such considerations but also they need to be involved in hand in experience of practically writing and submitting their articles under the supervision of the teachers so that their awareness regarding the expectations of the reviewers and journal editors are raised. Thus, as Edwards and Burns (2015) asserts, with the aim of promoting research and practically engaging the postgraduate students in the research and publication world, more practical research projects can be devised. Such practical research may give the postgraduate students the opportunity to engage in real research world so that their efforts by being knowledgeable about the requirements of publication world leads to publishing their RAs.

To help postgraduate students overcome publishing obstacles, publishing RAs should be tackled more practically in EFL curricula at all M.A. and Ph.D. levels where instructors should take publishing of articles with great care and motivate the students to improve their knowledge through all detailed processes and essentials. Likewise, universities should be more active in getting the academic database authorizations to offer Ph.D. students the availability to valid and up-to-date journals. In so doing, in addition to improving curriculum, syllabus, and methodology, universities need to offer workshops to postgraduate students highlighting not only all the essentials of RA writing in detail but also all expectations of pertinent journals which should be met regarding publishing. In addition, to obviate any publishing problem the postgraduate students have practically undergone while publishing their RAs, such problems need to be taken into account in the workshops. Furthermore, AW instructors need to provide support, such as hands-on research experience to postgraduate students as well as closer attention on requirements of RA publication and ethics of research so that they develop positive research experiences, which lead to publication.

The findings of the present study are hoped to successfully contribute to the body of related literature and help policy makers, practitioners, instructors, and curriculum designers particularly at higher educational levels. Taking into account the scarcity of research in relation to RA publication, this type of study can contribute to better understand the complexities and subtleties which entail the realization of the publication world. The study also lends to forging new studies and future directions in practice to help all EFL postgraduate students perceive, perform, and still cope with their challenges and problems while they are publishing their RAs.

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### Appendix A: The Essentials of RA Publishing

Taking your experiences into account regarding research article submission, how often do you pursue the following required and essential points before submitting your Research Articles?

| | Always 4 | Often 3 | Usually 2 | Hardly ever 1 | Never 0 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I get some scientific information about the target journal in terms of being indexed in Clarivate, Scopus, or published by Elsevier, Springer, etc. | | | | | |
| 2. In order to find an appropriate journal to submit my article, I use a journal-finder software to get some help. | | | | | |
| 3. I check the validity of the claimed index of the target journal from appropriate sites. | | | | | |
| 4. I check the high-ranked target journal in terms of Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4. | | | | | |
| 5. I try to carefully review the information about online submission system of the target journal. | | | | | |
| 6. I check the impact factor of the ISI- indexed target journal. | | | | | |
| 7. I sign up to the target journal to receive table of contents or notifications when articles are published. | | | | | |
| 8. I review the guidelines set by the candidate journal to follow the required formatting. | | | | | |
| 9. I pay attention to the regulations of conflict of interest by observing the rights of co-authors. | | | | | |
| 10. I write my cover letter professionally. | | | | | |
| 11. I finally select a proper journal for my manuscript. | | | | | |
| 12. I respond to reviewers' comments thoroughly. | | | | | |
| 13. I try to understand how editors assess my work in in-house reviewing process. | | | | | |
| 14. I consider the type of my article (i.e., short reports, original article, case studies, etc.) while choosing my target journal. | | | | | |
| 15. I assess the target journal to see whether it can be trusted. | | | | | |
| 16. I check the journals' guidelines for authors for formatting after I get primary review results. | | | | | |
| 17. I check the rate of acceptance of submitted articles in the target journal to decide if I should submit my article or not. | | | | | |
| 18. I check the length of time taken by the target journal to offer their decision before submitting. | | | | | |
| 19. I check the aims and scope of the candidate journal. | | | | | |
| 20. I download a sample paper of the candidate journal to carefully read and follow the style and organization of the published article. | | | | | |
| 21. I constantly keep any potential reviewer in mind before submitting. | | | | | |
| 22. I use relevant references from the articles in the target journal. | | | | | |
| 23. I use reference managers and formatting softwares such as Mandely or End-note. | | | | | |

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| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 24. I check my article by plagiarism checkers to avoid plagiarism. | | | | | |
| 25. I finalize the choice of the target journal with my professor or supervisor. | | | | | |

**Appendix B: Interview Questions**

1. What are the most common problems mentioned by editors or reviewers for which your research article has been rejected?

2. If you have not submitted any research article to journals, what are the obstacles?

3. What are some relevant problems contributing to successful publication of a research article?

4. What are the problems regarding finding good journals, checking their validity, and having access to them?

5. To what extent the problems mentioned by editors for the rejection of your articles match with what you have learned in your academic courses related to research article writing?