

Preparing manuscripts for EMAL and other international journals

PROFESSOR TONY BUSH
EMAL EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



BELMAS
British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society

MY PERSPECTIVE

- Editor-in-Chief of EMAL for 21 years
- Reviewer for ten major journals
- Prolific author – 90+ published articles (and three under review!)
- Mentor and co-author for several ECRs
- International usually means English language
- International also means publishing papers from many countries





EMAL SUBMISSIONS FROM AFRICA (2023)

- Ethiopia: 20
- South Africa: 18
- Ghana: 9
- Nigeria: 5
- Tanzania: 4
- Kenya: 2
- Namibia: 2
- Zimbabwe: 2
- Algeria, Botswana, Tunisia, Uganda: 1
- Total African submissions: 66

Total overall submissions: 608 (Acceptance Rate 10.9%)

Why Journal Publishing Matters

- It reaches a much wider audience than a thesis or book chapter
- It is accessible via all the major search engines
- University careers and academic reputations depend on publications
- Global university rankings (e.g. QS) are influenced by it journal outputs



Selecting your Journal

- Choose a journal linked to your title, abstract and key words (this sounds obvious, but EMAL receives many submissions unconnected to leadership or management)
- Be careful about Open Access (author pays) journals. The motive is often profit rather than quality. Most top journals (including EMAL) are funded by subscriptions, and there is no charge for publication
- Be careful about publishing scams (recently, some authors have paid for papers 'accepted' by EMAL, when they have never even been received by the journal). If in doubt, check with the editor)
- Think about how ambitious to be. It may be nice to publish in EMAL, if you are a leadership specialist, but good journals have low acceptance rates (EMAL 10.9%). First-time authors should consider submitting to less prestigious (but still good) journals



The Submission Process

- EMAL submissions go via: www.mc.manuscriptcentral.com/emal
- Most major journals use the same platform
- Manuscripts are received by the administrator (Louise for EMAL) for logging, and to check if they fit the length requirements (EMAL: 8,000 words maximum)
- If they pass this initial check, they are sent to the editor. For EMAL, this is me for most manuscripts, but deputy editor Megan Crawford for UK and North America
- Editors may reject the manuscript at this stage because they do not fit the journal's scope, or have obvious weaknesses (weak presentation, inadequate methods, no systematic literature review, no connections between data and literature, etc)
- Careful paper preparation is required – first impressions count!



The Review Process

- Manuscripts accepted for review are sent to two or three referees
- Reviewers are selected due to specific thematic or context knowledge (e.g. at least one African reviewer appointed for African submissions)
- The review process is anonymous
- Referees are unpaid, so allocating them is not straightforward and there may be delays
- Patience is required while reviews are awaited (EMAL average is 30 days, but most journals are much slower than this)



Review Reports

- Referees upload their reviews via the manuscript central system
- They provide comments for the author (and separately for the editor)
- They also make a recommendation (accept, minor revision, major revision, or reject). Which decisions are good outcomes?
- Accept is very unusual – only four EMAL papers in 21 years
- Reject outcomes are untypical on first submission but can happen
- Revision outcomes are normal and require author perseverance – don't give up!



Resubmissions

- Revised manuscripts are submitted in the same way
- They are usually sent to the same referees
- Authors should explain how they have responded to the revision requirements
- The same decision options are available to the editor, and further revisions are often required
- Perseverance is again required, 'stay in the game'



Choosing your Title

- Titles are very important, and require careful planning
- Typically, titles may indicate theme, context and method, for example:
 1. Instructional leadership in Zimbabwe: a multiple case study
 2. Leadership preparation in Ghana: provider and participant perspectives
 3. Teacher leadership in South Africa: Within and beyond the classroom
- Good titles help discoverability through search engines



Preparing your Abstract

- This is very important and should not be an ‘afterthought’
- Editors are ‘gatekeepers’ who often base initial decisions on title and abstracts
- Abstracts may also go to referees, and may influence their willingness to review
- Journals may or may not expect structured abstracts (EMAL does not) but they should outline aims, literature, method, findings and conclusion (EMAL: maximum 250 words)



Choosing Key Words

- Titles are very important, and require careful planning
- Titles may indicate theme, context and method, for example:
 1. Instructional leadership, Zimbabwe, monitoring, mentoring
 2. Ghana, leadership preparation, headship, in Ghana: provider and participant perspectives
 3. Teacher leadership, South Africa, classrooms, mentoring
- Key words also help discoverability through search engines



Preparing your manuscript

- Check the website of your target journal – scope, word length, submission process, etc.
- Situate your study for international readers (explain the context)
- Literature review should include international papers, not just those from your own context
- Literature may be both theoretical and empirical
- Keep the review focused on journal expectations (e.g., for EMAL, educational leadership, not business leadership)
- Explain and justify method (not just describe): think what, how, and why?
- Present data clearly, e.g. support statistical analysis with a careful explanation (ask would a policy-maker or practitioner understand?)
- Connect data to the literature in your discussion – what does your paper add to the existing body of knowledge on your topic?
- Address the audience at all times (why would anyone want to read my paper?)

Overview: Key Learning Points

- Very high technical quality – take advice from an English language expert
- Consider co-publication with a mentor or supervisor
- Select your journal carefully
- Prepare several drafts before first submission
- Important checks: Do you have a clear purpose, a sound literature review, careful explanation of method, sound data presentation, and good data/literature links?



Questions?

PLEASE ASK ANY QUESTIONS.



BELMAS

British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society