



Publishing mathematics education research in English: amplifying voices from the field

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Abstract

In this paper we investigate the issue of representation within the *Journal of Mathematics Teacher Education* (JMTE) and the broader academic publishing landscape, particularly focusing on the underrepresentation of authors from various world regions. A questionnaire, distributed globally, aimed to amplify the voices of the underrepresented, exploring the constraints and affordances of publishing in English-medium mathematics education research journals. The question that guided our investigation was: What do voices from the mathematics education community raise in their responses to questions about publishing in English-medium research journals like JMTE? We used qualitative methods to review the responses and identify common themes. The findings revealed significant barriers and challenges related to language, research location, and institutional support, highlighting the complexities of navigating the global academic community and the academic publishing culture. We propose actionable suggestions to foster a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive publishing environment.

Keywords Mathematics education research · Academic publishing practices · Language, location, and institutional barriers · Representation in publishing · Equity, diversity, and inclusion in academic journals

Introduction

Aligned to its international standing, the *Journal of Mathematics Teacher Education* (JMTE) wishes to publish articles from a broad geographical distribution. Yet the most recent Springer statistics presented to the Editorial Board showed us that some countries were underrepresented through disproportionately high rejection rates, while other countries had very low submission rates (for more details and statistics see Scheiner et al., 2024). Knowledge of these figures raised important questions about whether JMTE unintentionally creates barriers to the participation of authors from some world regions, or whether authors from different world regions have different opportunities to publish in JMTE. We wondered about possible impacts of overrepresentation, underrepresentation or the potential misrepresentation of regions on the research conducted, valued, and supported

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in the field. It was immediately clear to us that we had a representation problem, a problem that we read as being a challenge to equity, diversity, and inclusion for the journal. For this paper, we define the representation problem as threefold in relation to scarce diversity in geographical representation, potential exclusion of scholars whose main languages are not English, and potential inequities in the publication process.

This representation problem is shared by other international mathematics education research journals (see, e.g. Mesa, 2004; Mesa & Wagner, 2019). In fact, mathematics education as a field has reflexively examined the published research regarding issues of representation, including underrepresentation, overrepresentation, and misrepresentation (Abtahi & Planas, 2024). Themes evident in this body of literature centre on the English language dominance of the field (Caron, 2017; Geiger et al., 2022; Meaney, 2013; Mesa, 2004); tensions between the local context versus global relevance (Brodie, 2022; Caron, 2017; Goos, 2019; Vithal et al., 2023) and issues of power throughout the publishing process (Andrade-Molina et al., 2020; Mesa & Wagner, 2019; Valoyes-Chávez et al., 2021; Vithal et al., 2023; Wagner, 2021; Wagner et al., 2020) including those issues related to peer review (Lee et al., 2012; Mesa et al., 2021; Wagner, 2021). Clearly substantiated by literature evidence, our representation problem was worthy of further investigation.

As one of several actions (see Brodie, 2022; Scheiner et al., 2024), we decided to survey voices in the field. This action was situated in the context of our own agenda as an “equity, diversity, and inclusion committee” set up by the JMTE editorial board in 2022. We created a questionnaire, to be disseminated to the mathematics education community worldwide, in which we asked respondents to share some of the constraints and affordances of publishing in mathematics education journals such as JMTE. Our aim was to provide a way for underrepresented authors to voice their experiences, thus adding insight to the representation issue mentioned above. Our view of diversity went beyond geography, and we hoped to hear from both researchers in underrepresented regions and researchers marginalised within well-represented world regions. In this paper, we present an overview of the questionnaire findings regarding barriers to publishing so that we may further the conversation within the mathematics education community on this important issue of representation in academic publishing.

Literature background

One roadblock for publishing in an English-medium research journal such as JMTE may be the language, as has been noted by editors and published authors in mathematics education journals. As outlined by Meaney (2013), English has become the “lingua franca” of the mathematics education research community. Having one dominating language of communication confers both benefits and disadvantages; the greatest risk being that we may lose the diversity of perspectives that come from non-Western and non-English speaking countries. Geiger et al. (2022) use Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia to explore how converging on a single language constrains the diversity of ideas generated by the field and argue that the extent of the problem is greatly underestimated by native English speakers. Caron (2017) shares the “Francophone” perspective in a self-reflective paper about how difficult it is to express thoughts in English when it is not one’s main language. She notes that mathematics education is sensitive and complex, requiring a “delicate use of words” (p. 13). Goos (2019) furthers the argument by suggesting that language issues go beyond technical difficulties as barriers can arise from the subtle differences between semantic

fields. Language support in the editorial process is important, but insufficient to address underrepresentation and the extreme of misrepresentation (Mesa & Wagner, 2019).

The above issues of language are connected to globalisation of mathematics education (Geiger et al., 2022; Mesa & Wagner, 2019). With so much of the research field already dominated by a few, this means those who come from less represented regions may be faced with additional challenges. Context provides a “rich source” of problems for investigation, necessary for rationalising and substantiating any given study, yet international journals require one to go beyond the local and speak to international relevance (Goos, 2019). This raises the question of to whom it might be relevant. In a publishing context dominated by the Global North (Vithal et al., 2023) the making relevant of a study may mean instead altering the concerns to match those of majority groups in majority countries (Mesa & Wagner, 2019). Wagner et al. (2020) ask, to whose mathematics experience the research attends. An example of this may be seen in the way manuscripts from the USA do not always explain their contexts, and perhaps USA-based reviewers do not expect them to (Goos, 2019), while authors from other countries are required to. Another example is provided by Caron (2017) who researches in Quebec—a French speaking province of Canada. Here the situation is reversed, as the research location reflects North American concerns that are not well understood by the French journals targeted for this work.

Also connected to the specific challenges of language and context, the setting of many Western publishing contexts creates structural and colonial issues in the neoliberal publishing discourse (Meaney, 2013). The “publish or perish” mantra has greater implications for those from non-English speaking countries who must nevertheless publish in prestigious, typically English-medium, journals (Valoyes-Chávez et al., 2021) to show that they are sufficiently competitive. Journal ranking systems and metrics themselves contribute to sites of exclusion (Andrade-Molina et al., 2020) and citation devices, together with funding requirements, constitute a vicious, self-perpetuating cycle (Meaney, 2013). The systems of peer review are implicated and shaped by issues of power (Valoyes-Chávez et al., 2021). Bias in peer review reflects all the above issues already discussed, for example language bias in review is somewhat mitigated by having blind reviewers (Lee et al., 2012), demonstrating how it is easier to “see” language problems when you already know an author is from a non-English speaking country. Bias also exists related to the content of the manuscript submitted (Lee et al., 2012), for example when not reflecting the majority concerns as previously discussed. A fair review, by contrast, notes that there are many types of “Englishes,” takes the author’s perspective (Mesa et al., 2021), and focuses on the novel contribution of the manuscript (Wagner, 2021). An initiative of editors in 2020–2021 to address this issue of bias in reviewing led to signing of a joint statement.¹ This statement includes: “Presumptions of racial and cultural superiority in reviewing have in that way added to a chronic silencing of the voices of authors from historically oppressed groups in society at large.” (Choppin & Battey et al., 2021, para 1; see also Scheiner et al., 2024).

While the literature reviewed briefly here raises important issues, we note that this work largely comes from those already amplified voices; many of these authors are privileged as editors of English-language journals in mathematics education. Although the authors have experience and a perspective on such issues, they do not tend to face them personally. Comparatively absent are perspectives from the underrepresented members of our mathematics education research community, such as those from non-English-speaking countries,

¹ See <https://mathematicseducationjournals.com>.

the Global South, or those who have not been able to publish their research in English-medium journals. The need to hear from these other voices, and to understand how different expressions of the problem of representation matters to their research and academic lives, is clear.

The following question guided our investigation: What do voices from the mathematics education community raise in their responses to questions about publishing in English-medium research journals like JMTE?

Methodological approach

Our study belongs to the body of mathematics education research utilising survey questionnaires to gather information in relation to complex international topics that require collective understanding by seeing individual or local experiences together. Bakker et al. (2021), for example, used similar survey methods to collect questionnaire data around the topic of what themes research in mathematics education should focus on in the decade starting in 2020. Matthews et al. (2022) also used survey methods around the topic of equity in mathematics education. These are examples of survey studies that, like ours, produced a quantity of data to support the qualitative discussion of the participants' responses, beyond descriptive measures.

The broad aim of our study was to inform our efforts in making JMTE more equitable, diverse, and inclusive. Yet we chose not to limit ourselves to this journal only, assuming that our findings would have relevance to the wider community. More specifically, the main aim for our research was to unpack potential causes for the lack of global geographical representation in published articles within English-medium mathematics education journals. As a first step to improving representation, we needed a better understanding of the issues faced by participants of the mathematics education research community worldwide.

The questionnaire design and procedures were submitted to the first author's institution and ethical approval was obtained. During the meetings to design our questionnaire, we considered and discussed several candidate questions in English, and how they could be put in combination. We were aware that the problem of representation is multidimensional, hence not easily measurable or associated with a unique set of questions. Nonetheless, we were also aware that our chosen questions would prompt responses in different directions. Correspondingly, we formulated open questions that would allow us to access reasons or explanations underlying the representation problem as seen by participants.

From June 2022 we each distributed the questionnaire invite among our networks, for example to our personal mailing lists, social media groups, conference contacts, and we used a snowballing recruitment by asking people to pass along the invite. Because we are ourselves a geographically diverse group (based on five continents), this immediately generated a wide distribution. To expand the recruitment of geographic regions further, one author translated the questionnaire into Spanish,² for distribution in Spanish-speaking countries, and the English language version of the questionnaire invite was published in an editorial of JMTE (Brodie, 2022). The link to both language versions of the questionnaire

² We took advantage of the expertise in our team considering our knowledge that many academics from Spanish speaking countries are encouraged to publish in English, regardless of their own expertise with the language. We acknowledge that, ideally, we would have had a variety of different language translations. We also noted a number of Spanish speakers answered the English version of the questionnaire nonetheless.

was presented with an introductory information letter. In this letter, we presented ourselves as “a committee made up of members of the Editorial Board of the Journal of Mathematics Teacher Education (JMTE)” with the goal being “to expand the scope of manuscript submissions and publications from historically underrepresented countries and people”.

The questionnaire

Participation in our final questionnaire, with 12 questions, was intended to take no more than ten minutes and included:

- a) Demographic and career questions: *Which country are you based in? What position do you hold? What is your main area of research interest?*
- b) Questions about access to research articles and institutional support: *What percentage of your work is allocated to research? How is your institutional access to journals? How do you access articles you wish to read?*
- c) Questions about experiences of publishing in mathematics education journals generally: *In what type of journals have you published? What aspects do you consider when selecting a journal for your manuscript?*
- d) Questions about experiences of publishing in JMTE specifically: *Have you published in/submitted to JMTE and Do you read JMTE articles? Would you like to comment on your experiences of the reviewing process?*
- e) Two final open-ended questions: *What challenges/barriers do you face in getting your writing published? What supports are available to you to help get your writing published? (e.g. from your institution, from peers, from journals).* Note these open questions were not specific to JMTE.

The respondents

Our reach through e-mail lists and local networks in search of potential respondents was wide. We obtained 416 responses from people based in 72 countries (Table 1) and with differing prior experience of publishing in JMTE (Table 2). On the one hand, some of our choices during the questionnaire design (e.g. the preparation of a Spanish version of the survey) visibly had an impact on the final sample. On the other hand, the distribution through wider lists and networks favoured the participation of respondents who were not influenced by collaboration with us, hence attaining a more diverse selection.

Though a substantial number of responses come from the USA, making North America the most dominant region in this dataset, a wide array of countries is represented, from every continent. It is worth noting that we would not expect participation to be proportional to population. Some countries have small communities of mathematics education researchers in comparison with their population. In Pakistan, for example, mathematics education is part of education courses, but active academic research in this field is limited to two or three institutions of higher learning. This highlights the difficulties in defining what might constitute an adequate representation globally.

To dig more deeply into the results, we decided to group countries according to whether they were from the Global North or Global South. This was not unproblematic as definitions are not always consistent. We settled on a classification list from Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_North_and_Global_South), which places countries from Africa, Central and South America, and parts of Asia and Australasia in the Global South,

Table 1 Distribution of responses by region and country

Region	Country claimed (no. of respondents)	No. of respondents (%)
Africa	South Africa (20), Zimbabwe (5), Ghana (4), Rwanda (4), Malawi (3), Lesotho (2), Namibia (2), Nigeria (2), Tanzania (2), Algeria (1), Ethiopia (1), Kenya (1), Morocco (1), Uganda (1)	49 (12%)
Asia	Philippines (9), Indonesia (5), India (4), Pakistan (3), Singapore (3), Hong Kong (2)/China (1), Bhutan (1), Brunei (1), Kazakhstan (1), Malaysia (1), South Korea (1), Sri Lanka (1), Taiwan (1), Uzbekistan (1)	35 (8%)
Central America	Costa Rica (2), Guatemala (2)	4 (1.0%)
Europe	Spain (16), Germany (10), Sweden (10), Italy (8), UK (8), Ireland (6), France (4), Greece (4), Portugal (4), Czech Republic (3), Hungary (3), Poland (3), Croatia (2), Denmark (2), Switzerland (2), Albania (1), Cyprus (1), Netherlands (1), Norway (1), Slovakia (1), Slovenia (1)	91 (22%)
Middle East	Israel (6), Iran (2), Lebanon (2), Qatar (2), Turkey (31), UAE (2), Saudi Arabia (1)	46 (11%)
North America	USA (77), Mexico (26), Canada (2)	105 (25%)
Oceania	Australia (8), New Zealand (7)	15 (4%)
South America	Colombia (12), Chile (6), Argentina (5), Brazil (4), Peru (3), Venezuela (3), Uruguay (1)	34 (8%)
No response ^a	–	37 (9%)
Total	–	416 (100%)

^aWe assume not answering this question may have been due to not wanting to be identifiable (when combined with other demographics)

Table 2 Experiences of publishing with JMTE

Regarding JMTE, which of the following applies?	No	Global North ^a	Global South
I have published in JMTE	74	64	5
I have submitted to JMTE but was not accepted	132	84	36
I would be interested in submitting to JMTE	229	127	82
I am not interested in submitting to JMTE	7	5	2
I often read JMTE articles	133	82	43
I sometimes read JMTE articles	135	89	34
I have never read a JMTE article	26	4	20
Did not respond to any prompt	17	4	11

^aNote that some respondents (37) did not answer the country context question and thus we could not assign them to either category

and regions such as Europe, North America, and other parts of Asia and Australasia in the Global North. However, we acknowledge that any such decision is inherently questionable (see Scheiner et al., 2024, for elaboration).

Directly related to our aim of learning about experiences of publishing in JMTE specifically, we asked respondents about their interest to submit to and read the journal, as shown in Table 2.

This table shows that our questionnaire reached researchers who would have liked to publish in journals such as JMTE. Many respondents read the journal, and many were interested in submitting, but far fewer had gone on to publish in the journal, suggesting that respondents may have faced barriers to successful publication. Further, while approximately one-third of respondents to these questions were from the Global South, this proportion certainly does not reflect the proportion of those who have published in the journal.

The analytical methods

As a group we met virtually once per month over one year and a half to discuss the questionnaire data. Our first wave of analysis involved creating a spreadsheet of the data, organising the responses to each question, and creating categories and counts of the data. As our meetings progressed, we decided that we wanted to focus on quantitative results coming from the itemised questions but also on qualitative insights coming from the open questions posed to the participants. Several potential themes were evident in the reflective and exploratory discussions around what the voices of the participants had raised about publishing in English-medium research journals like JMTE. Our reading of the literature also informed this process.

To generate themes, we adopted a theme investigation approach (van Leeuwen et al., 2020), where a theme is seen as a tool aimed at reframing a given problem by understanding its underlying issues and the root causes for its complexity. We followed van Leeuwen et al., (2020) steps of identifying themes, immersing ourselves in them, sharing and discussing, reflecting, and finally visualising and connecting. To produce themes, the diversity within the team and the process of continuous discussion were fundamental. Some of us had similar personal and professional experiences to those reported in questionnaire responses. This provided an additional perspective of intersubjectivity to the analytical processes.

Our themes were generated from responses across the dataset; however, in our presentation of findings we focus primarily on responses related to barriers to publishing as these emerged strongly in the dataset, and these were our main goal for investigation. All the original categories we created and counted in the first stage of analysis are represented in the final themes; for example, one barrier was “time,” and another was “finances” and these both contributed to the institutional constraints theme. Because the questions we analysed were open-ended, we do not present counts of our resulting themes; we felt this quantification would be a false representation of the opinions expressed. There were many ways to answer the questions, and choosing to answer in one way does not preclude agreement with another answer. We believe the themes we present in the following section will resonate with readers.

We made several decisions when grouping our data, such as by Global North and Global South, as discussed above. We also acknowledge that we could have divided the responses differently. For example, we considered separating predominantly English-speaking from non-English-speaking countries to assist in our consideration of the role of language in publishing experiences. However, we soon saw that there were many people with English as a second (or third) language who were working in English-speaking countries and we decided against making this categorisation as it did not allow us to compare between respondents who did and did not face language challenges. In any quotes from respondents, we have chosen to give the country they specified, yet we emphasise that this identification may hide the marginalised experience for the respondent, as is often evident in the quote itself.

In the sections to follow, we present an overview of our findings regarding barriers faced in publishing, we note how these align with the research literature, and we conclude with answers to our research questions and make recommendations for the field of mathematics education.

Amplifying voices from the field: an overview of findings

We report the findings in three sections that point to three broad themes: Language; Research location; and Institutional constraints. In each section we define and elaborate our understanding of the theme and illustrate with verbatim quotes from the questionnaire data.

Theme 1. Language

Over half the respondents to our survey were either based in countries where English is not an official language, or they self-identified as not speaking English as one of their home languages. These respondents provided important insights into different language-related challenges they face. These challenges go beyond the technicalities of translation and are particularly pronounced for non-native English speakers. They include nuances of meaning and cultural significations associated with expressing complex ideas in another language, alongside broader implications for academic participation and visibility within our community.

It is worth emphasising that language may be a broadly experienced challenge. For example, some survey participants are based in countries where English serves as the official language, such as the USA, or as a common language, whether officially (e.g. South Africa) or unofficially (e.g. Sweden). The sociolinguistic realities of the participants’

countries do not uniformly determine the experiences of English-related challenges in academic publishing. For instance, two participants from USA remarked, “English is not my first language, so some challenges are related to just editing before submission,” and “Language is definitely another barrier”. Similarly, two participants from South Africa noted, “Consult English first language speaker,” and “Difficulty to write high standard English papers, especially, if English is not my first or home language”. A respondent from Sweden mentioned the need for support with the English language, adding, “even though I’m classified as native speaker”. This illustrates that a subset of participants in countries where English is a common language (e.g. within institutions and media), who are themselves bilingual or multilingual with English as one of their languages, face challenges with academic writing in English.

Articulating ideas in English

Several respondents underscored the challenges associated with articulating complex ideas in English, highlighting the difficulties in formulating ideas in English that might be expressed more naturally or precisely in their home languages. For example, a participant from Greece explained: “It is demanding for a non-native English speaker to express ideas”. Similarly, a respondent from Germany remarked, “Actually, writing in English is maximum 95% as precise for me as I wish. So, language is an issue, still after 30 years in the field”. These comments underline the difficulty of articulating complex ideas in the academic writing register of a language other than a home language of the researcher, as well as the challenge of translating nuanced ideas into academic written English while retaining their original meaning and impact.

Issues around use of academic language for publishing in English are entwined with broader, more complex issues, such as the role of language in the development of thinking and mental structures. This relationship is highlighted by the experiences and observations of some respondents. For instance, one participant from Chile noted the distinct cognitive frameworks and mental structures among Latinx, attributing these differences to more than linguistic factors: “English and Latinos think differently, we have others mental structures, it can be the language as well as the idiosyncrasy of the country itself” (Chile). This perspective underscores the profound impact of language, as perceived by some authors, on thought processes that are seen as idiosyncratic of featured communication and shaping academic expression and communication.

Additionally, some respondents expressed a sense of disadvantage due to their non-native status in English. For instance, a participant from the Czech Republic stated, “... Native speakers have great advantage in that they can formulate ideas in English scientifically”. A respondent from Portugal mentioned, “My poor confidence in writing in English, it takes me longer to make a decision”. These remarks reveal a perceived barrier that affects their confidence and ease in the academic publishing process. It is noteworthy how these participants seem to equate English nativeness with proficiency in academic English writing or the ability to use “English scientifically”. This perspective contrasts with the views expressed by the respondent from Sweden, as well as by other participants from the USA and South Africa, suggesting that fluency in academic English writing may also be an issue for native English speakers. Distinguishing academic English from English proficiency in general is important because understanding journal writing as a genre with multiple registers is a challenge for both people who have and who do not have English as a home language. Cummins (2000) identified and made a distinction between academic Cognitive

Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) and social Basic Interpersonal Communication Skill (BICS). Developing CALP or academic language proficiency in a language that is not a home language, however, implies additional challenges that may not be visible to all or distinguishable from the quality of the research.

Some participants pointed to issues of “linguistic classism” and “prejudices” in English academic publishing:

... we often face challenges in English writing, so some editors/reviewers adopt a kind of linguistic classism (sorry for being rude but this is how we feel many times) in which linguistic issues take precedence over the quality of the research (Spain).

Some respondents mentioned the high linguistic standards expected by prestigious journals as a significant barrier for authors who do not have English as a home language, even affecting their choice of publication venues. For example, a respondent from Colombia stated they need to seek out journals in a language other than English, since they do not possess the level of English proficiency required for publication, even if this means publishing their research in a journal with a lower impact factor:

El otro gran limitante es el inglés que en mi caso no domino por lo que los que estamos en esta situación, a veces nos toca buscar revistas en español cuyo impacto suele ser menor en estos momentos. [*The other big limitation is English which, in my case, I do not master, so for those of us in this situation, sometimes we have to find journals in Spanish which currently have lower impact: translated by authors*] (Colombia).

This indicates that language barriers affect not only the writing process but also the selection of journals for submission.

The shift to journals published in languages other than English to navigate linguistic barriers, however, does not necessarily mitigate the challenges associated with academic writing. The issue of adhering to the academic register in written mode, regardless of the language of publication, was emphasised by another participant from Colombia, who pointed out the need for guidance on “every aspect of academic writing in international journals in Spanish or English”. Thus, the language barriers identified by some scholars are not solely tied to English; the academic register of journals, including those in Spanish, presents its own set of challenges.

The complexity of academic writing, and the issue of developing the CALP dimension as posed in Cummins (2000), raised by a variety of participants problematises or challenges any polarisation between English “natives” and English “non-natives” in the discussion of our survey data. We cannot know from our data how different the situation is between academic writing in English and academic writing in a home language for researchers whose dominant language is not English.

Desire for more inclusive publishing practices

Scholars underscored the critical need for support systems within the academic community to mitigate language issues, particularly for those who do not have English as a home language. For example, a respondent from Turkey stated, “Due to the fact that I am not a native English speaker, I usually receive a warning that my manuscript requires proofreading. I request that you provide free editing services”. This suggests a desire for more inclusive practices that accommodate non-native English speakers. In turn, the call for more inclusive practices extends beyond the provision of language support

services to address deeper issues of epistemic diversity and epistemic justice within the research community. As stated by another respondent:

Another thing that could help is having a more diverse pool of editorial board members who can ‘see’ the articles and their quality beyond issues of language. Unprejudiced editorial members who are also knowledgeable and sensible about the epistemic positions of researchers from non-dominant groups (Chile).

Furthermore, some participants mentioned how the necessity of translating their manuscripts is a considerable and additional step in their publication process. A respondent from Mexico pointed out the complexities and financial burdens introduced by the need for professional translation service. Another participant elaborated:

The biggest barrier to publishing in English is the language barrier. While there is a competence to communicate in English, writing an academic text in another language is much more complex. This implies that it must be sent for translation, and many times, the translators do not maintain the sense that the author wanted to give it (for linguistic or grammatical reasons). In addition, this sending for translation requires a payment that is not cheap (Chile).

The need for translation, and the associated challenges and costs, highlight the difficulties in ensuring that the nuanced meanings and intentions of the author are preserved.

My institution hires a free proofreading service for our manuscript. However, they are not mathematics educators and non-native English speakers. Therefore, their language editing does not help that much. (Turkey)

These insights highlight a growing awareness and demand for systemic changes within international academic publishing. Such changes aim to foster an environment where linguistic diversity is not seen as a barrier but as an integral part of the rich tapestry of academic discourse. More inclusive measures are seen as essential steps towards recognising and valuing the wide range of epistemic contributions from across the global research community, ensuring that all voices, irrespective of linguistic background, are heard and respected. Concerns are raised that certain linguistic structures and expressions may not translate well into English, potentially marginalising diverse ways of thinking and of expressing complex ideas. Language hence poses a problem to diversity, equity, and inclusion as English-only journals clearly lack linguistic diversity; equity is compromised for those scholars who must pay more (real costs of translation and editing) and who face prejudice with reviews. A result is lack of inclusion of some scholars and their potentially novel ways of thinking. As we will elaborate in the final section, we call for journals to make space for the diversity of languages spoken.

Theme 2. Research Location

A key element that came through in the responses is how the location of the research influences researcher’s experiences of publishing. By “location” we refer to both the geographical *context* and location of the *content* within the wider discipline of mathematics education. Our analysis of the questionnaire responses suggested two main dimensions regarding research location, which we have called: marginal–mainstream; and local–global.

Marginal–mainstream

An issue that arose throughout the responses was researchers' experiences of marginality within the discipline. Various content aspects of marginality were discussed. One was research methods, indicating that some research practices were mainstreamed and favoured over others. These practices ranged from data collection to analytic methods to theoretical framings. One participant's comment summarised many of the responses:

It seems that there is not very good acceptance of works with theoretical or methodological frameworks other than the 'classic' or those that are fashionable. Furthermore, it seems that an article cannot be written in a different way. That is, use literary resources and not necessarily follow the formula of introduction, theoretical framework.... conclusion. In short, in general, there are few spaces to do new things (Chile).

Longitudinal datasets or data that seemed messier than more usual studies were perceived to review more poorly than studies that had cleaner and more straight-forward results. One respondent from Sweden stated, "my research area (large-scale PD programs) includes, many times, null results. I find it harder to publish null (or sometimes even negative) results than positive results". Analytic methods were another area where the marginal–mainstream divide was discussed. "Traditional" or "classic" were adjectives used in the questionnaire to express barriers to some researchers' work. One participant from USA expressed the challenge of working away from mainstream coding and theoretical frameworks.

Experiences of marginality were not limited to methods. Some researchers felt marginalised because of their research interest and stated that they consider other publication outlets because their work did not fit with research that was historically published in JMTE. These marginalised research areas include newer theories (e.g. embodied cognition, positioning theory), alternative perspectives (e.g. creativity or student-centred perspectives) and topics (e.g. informal mathematics, equity issues in teacher education). Marginality was also perceived in the context of the work. One participant from Mexico replied, "It is clear to me that, despite this kind of efforts, the field of mathematics education research still is Anglocentric and Eurocentric". Some respondents also cited the context of their work as a barrier to publication. This included work that was not connected to the Common Core Standards in the USA, even though the work was done outside the USA where the standards were not relevant.

Lastly, one compelling response highlighted the issue of marginality within marginalised groups. They stated:

My work sometimes challenges the latest thinking about equity. Ironically, I see math ed scholars marginalizing scholars from historically excluded groups in the name of equity, because their work doesn't fit the current equity mold. I suspect this is from insecurity on the part of many math ed researchers -- they know about the latest equity trends, but not enough to feel confident in questioning or countering those trends when it might make sense to do so. (USA)

This quote exemplifies prior marginalised work with an equity focus becoming mainstream and then marginalising other subgroups within that equity focus.

Local–global

Intersecting with the marginal–mainstream dimension is how the local contexts relate to global concerns and issues in mathematics education. The dimension of local–global relates to the need for the authors to make their local context accessible and to show the relevance of the local study to the international community. As mentioned in the prior subsection, contextual issues such as local concerns and commitments (e.g. Common Core Math in the USA) tend to lean toward the Global North. Authors from less represented countries, usually the Global South, are often asked to do more to explain their local context and demonstrate relevance to research of the Global North. Some researchers from the Global South found this aspect to be particularly challenging and concerning, wondering why local contexts cannot speak to global issues or how to achieve these links in manuscripts. Some of these comments are related to the language issues discussed above but go beyond them. “I find it challenging to present regional research in such a way that the international community recognizes its relevance” (Mexico).

We note here that all research is done locally, within a context that may be similar or different from other contexts. What seems unfair, to some respondents and to us, is that researchers from some contexts, predominantly in the Global South, are consistently asked to show the relevance of their research to global concerns, while researchers from the more dominant countries are not often asked to do so. This assumes that the Global North is the norm, which all other countries must fit, rather than requiring all authors to think about global concerns beyond their own contexts.

Additionally, many scholars work in isolation, making it more difficult to publish. Finding a significant focus and contribution may be difficult for these researchers. When larger, highly funded teams work on projects together, it is easier to see how various pieces come together and where one’s work can make significant contributions. It is much harder for individual researchers to see how smaller studies fit into the broader literature. For example, a scholar from Brunei, said it is “difficult to present the claim as new piece of knowledge as there have always been so much information available. It is always a challenge to add new knowledge in the web of already available information”.

There is much research about the gatekeeping role of mathematics (Gutierrez, 2013; Wagner, 2021), and clearly the mathematics education research community also engage in gatekeeping practices. The mainstream becomes de-facto “global”, while the marginal research and minoritised contexts must do extra work to justify their research. Two clear steps forward emerge here. First, as the Chilean respondent suggests, is for all journals to ensure a diverse pool of reviewers. Second, for reviewers to insist that mainstream research, especially when conducted in the Global North, justifies the relevance of their work to other (minoritised) contexts. Currently, it is a common practice to ensure authors cite the journal in which they seek publication. What if authors were instead required to cite journals from diverse geographical contexts? In other words, rather than having to justify a local interest to the global community, perhaps the mainstream contexts should have to justify the significance locally, and across different locations. This revolution in citation practice could alter the metrics that serve to systematically reward global journals over local ones.

Theme 3. Institutional constraints

In response to the question of challenges to publishing their work, there were many researchers who spoke of institutional constraints. By “institution” we refer to both the institution in which they work—specifically, the university, and the institution of journals

themselves. One quote stood out that reflects the tension inherent in the conditions imposed by the journal institutions: “The usual result [from reviewers is] critical criticism aimed to discourage publishing – it is like how do you dare publish with us” (South Africa). Thus, while the university institution puts enormous pressure on academics to publish, the journal institution appears equally motivated *not* to publish their work. To use a colloquial expression (in English language), this means we academics are “stuck between a rock and a hard place”. However, as the various responses below indicate, the “hard place” of the university institution is much harder for some, and the “rock” of the journal institution is similarly less giving for some. In the sections below we present the barriers described pertaining to the institutional rocks and hard places.

The “rock”: the institution of the journal

The constraints imposed by journals, as mentioned by respondents, were perceived as coming from the editors and reviewers themselves, or were due to the logistics of the submission, review, and publishing process.

While a few respondents stated the challenge was situated with themselves needing to learn how to deal with review comments, many more had complaints regarding the work of reviewers and editors—or in the (presumably facetious) words of one respondent “Getting the reviewers to recognize the brilliance of my work:)” (USA). Generally, complaints fell into three main categories (1) incompetent reviewing; (2) biased reviewing (or bias from the editor); (3) lack of direction or poor decision-making from the editor.

There were a range of responses about “incompetent reviewing”. For example, a respondent from Czech Republic wrote of reviewers without expertise in either quantitative or qualitative methodologies and another from Brazil wrote about lack of understanding of theory and methodology more generally. The following quote was specific:

In the past I have experienced the following challenges with the reviews I received on my work (not from JMTE): a) extensive delays (up to 13 months from the first decision letter); b) reviewers who want to promote their own research agenda (theoretical or methodological) and c) reviewers that do not read the work properly and rely on first impressions and superficial elements of the paper. (UK)

Going beyond incompetence, many responses related to bias in the reviewing, including comments about content, context, methods used, or the language/ethnicity of the author. A responder from Canada wrote of the “different cliques inside math education” such as mathematics professors versus those who came from a teaching background. A participant from South Africa noted a “well known” bias from editors that happened “when they see an African name”. Another response from Chile noted something similar about the Global South, while a professor from the USA commented that “reviewers often center whiteness and research and theoretical approaches by and about white people”. Additionally, bias was noted related to language. A response from Croatia wrote of the consistent requirement that “the language should be checked” despite having already had it edited by a native English speaker, an example of the “linguistic classism” mentioned earlier.

A few respondents spoke of poor direction or decision making from the editor, such as when a manuscript is rejected without review, or the editor fails to summarise the revisions needed, despite contradictory advice from reviewers. One respondent from Lebanon thought the handling editors should take underrepresentation into consideration, while another suggested the need for a more varied reviewer pool:

The present pool wants the same kind of articles over and over again. Where are the newer theories (embodied cognition, positioning theory etc), more novel methodologies (eyetracking, focus group discussions) or more novel themes (informal learning of teaching maths, equity issues in TE) (Unspecified)

One respondent felt that even with reviewer buy-in, their context was a barrier to acceptance in the journal.

I have also had positive comments from reviewers, responded to these, only to get it rejected by the editor because s/he didn't like that we used a concept differently from how it was used in his/her context. So there are some difficulties that could be ironed out here. (Unspecified)

There were also comments made regarding the logistics involved in the publishing process, such as: knowing how to find the right journal; the time taken for review; costs charged for publication, word or space constraints. A few respondents had specific comments about their experience with JMTE regarding communication issues and errors involved in the production process. A few people commented on the difficulty in finding the right journal, especially when the descriptions of aims and scope are vague. Word limits can be constraining, and several people commented on the length of time of the review process "It takes very long to receive feedback after an article has been submitted" (Malawi). Moreover a few commented on the costs involved for Open Access publishing or the editing services suggested by journals:

Am referred to editing services which when engaged do not change much of the text. Sometimes a lot of time is taken before a response is provided and high publication fees. (Qatar)

The "hard place": on institutional support

Our analysis of the data clearly demonstrates the differing levels of support for researchers in terms of a publishing and research culture. As indicated in the quotes below such support includes financial, collegial, and university support in all aspects of the research process, including funding, selecting, and submitting to journals.

Lack of colleagues in my institution/context, lack of colleagues available in my country who involve in mathematics education research, having very little time allocated for doing research within the context of my professional life. (Sri Lanka)

Funding for Open Access manuscripts was mentioned as an issue in some countries. While some universities and/or countries have agreements to pay for Open Access, so that the financial burden does not fall on the researchers, this does not seem to be the case in all countries and institutions.

Funding for Open Access for accepted submitted manuscripts because most times my research is unfunded and Brunei does not fall in the medium and low-income countries. (Brunei)

In some countries, educational institutions offer different types of work contracts from part-time instructors to full-time researchers. Thus, the conditions for much of the university academic personnel to get involved in research projects are limited. In addition, instructors and full-time researchers often have a heavy teaching load. In general, teaching

activities is a necessary condition for academics to get promoted, but it is not sufficient—they need to be involved in research projects and get their work published in indexed journals.

I don't have any support from my institution, I'm a contract worker, I don't have a base job. From some colleagues if there is support, especially from researchers from the Asian continent, the indexed journals are abundant, it is necessary to select those that are not useful. (Mexico)

There were several participants who wished for institutional support to get their work translated to English and to receive editing advice during the process of preparing their research manuscript to fulfil international academic standards:

My institution can support me with some money for translations or proofreading, or even for paying journal fees, but you have to meet very strict conditions, sometimes unrealistic for the research dynamics (Mexico)

None. The only support is state funding from the government through research projects in which items for translations can be included. However, the resources are not sufficient for all the researchers in the area. (Chile)

Some of the participants pointed out that their universities did not have the culture and traditions to support researchers to get involved in research programs. Therefore, doing and publishing research becomes an individual project that is carried out with the individual's own resources.

En mi país no hay cultura de publicación, poco apoyo para la investigación y desconocimiento de los procesos de selección de la revista apropiada. [In my country there is not a publishing culture, little support for research and lack of knowledge of the processes of selecting the appropriate journal] (Guatemala)

Some participants pointed to a lack of support regarding publishing fees, for example a participant from Turkey: "Our university does not acknowledge journals that charge a publishing fee" and another participant from Ethiopia: "Some journals provide waiver for our country's research studies. But the support provided from our institution for educational research is very small and sometimes, none at all". One participant from Australia noted the tension, or impossibility, with the comment:

My institution has the expectation papers are published in Q1 [top quartile] journals, many of which charge for publication and then cost more for open access, for which I do not get funding. (Australia)

In general, universities appear to privilege publication in indexed journals with high impact factors. Researchers in mathematics education may be disadvantaged due to a system to assess and evaluate researchers' academic work that has been developed in other areas such as biology, physics, chemistry. Further, the onus is on the Global South to bend to the metrics of the Global North. Thus, researchers face serious difficulties to get their work published in journals that fulfil their institution's requirements. In addition, it is clear from several responses that some universities offer little or no support to researchers to get their work published.

While neoliberal agendas may increase the squeeze between rock and hard place, it is worth noting how the two institution types are in "cahoots" here. Journals rely on university pressure to publish in their profit-making enterprises, and universities require the journals to be exclusive so that they may compete in the international marketplace by obtaining

high rankings from their publication in prestigious journals. We note also that comments from various respondents suggest that for some this situation is a tighter squeeze than for others, as they are writing from a more marginalised position, experiencing bias from reviewers, and at the same time face greater institutional pressure, with less institutional support. We call on those with more breathing space to instigate systemic change to this dynamic, to perhaps push back against both institutions.

Discussion

The findings shed light on the systemic barriers within academic publishing, highlighting the dominant role of English and the Global North and the resulting challenges for non-native English speakers or those from the South. The significant disparities in representation, the influence of institutional pressures, and the complexity of the peer review process underscore the inequalities that permeate all systems involved within the academic publishing “game”. In particular, the experiences shared by respondents from different geographical locations highlight the urgent need for journals and the wider academic community to critically assess and redesign their practices to accommodate and celebrate linguistic and epistemic diversity.

To summarise, first, our survey reveals that language poses a significant barrier in publishing for many academics who are not native in speaking or writing English. Challenges include difficulties in linguistic expression, the need for meaning-accurate translation, and perceived disadvantages when compared with native English speakers and writers, especially in top-tier journals. The implications of these challenges are substantial in our field, where English often serves as the lingua franca (Meaney, 2013). The problem exists at an individual level, such as for the scholars who struggle with proficiency in the academic register (Cummins, 2000) of English (including native speakers and writers), yet who are nevertheless required to communicate findings in English journals; something Meaney (2013) describes as an act of oppression. Yet the language problem exists on a wider scale than just for the individual; the entire community is impoverished when we lose the diversity that comes from greater inclusion of those who think differently (Geiger et al., 2022; Meaney, 2013).

This situation highlights the need for more inclusive publishing practices that acknowledge and support the linguistic diversity of our community. In our data, there were no comments about the increased technological capacity for meaning-accurate translation, yet this and other solutions may be supportive and are possible. Journals should explore new opportunities for supporting diverse language speakers. For equity reasons any additional expense would need to be borne by institutions (e.g. the journal, the university), not the researchers. Among other possible solutions are language support considering the unique language backgrounds of the authors, encouraging submissions in multiple languages, and a peer-review process that recognises the linguistic efforts of all scholars—whether native or non-native English speakers and writers—in using the written academic register (of research journals) in this language. Some of these solutions have been suggested before (Meaney, 2013; Mesa, 2004), yet our data indicate they have not yet been attained.

Second, there are other ways in which marginalisation has been experienced by researchers submitting to journals such as JMTE. Our colleagues’ experiences are that papers have been rejected based on not being located mainstream enough in relation to topic, methods, and context. Further, respondents from some countries shared the

frustration of having to situate their local research within a global context that often does not reflect their unique experiences and challenges (see also Mesa & Wagner, 2019; Wagner et al., 2020). Many Global South and some Global North researchers are asked to articulate the relevance of their work for other contexts, while some Global North researchers are not asked to do so, and their context is thus kept mainstream and constructed as “normal”; the review process itself appears designed to facilitate the sort of gatekeeping (Wagner, 2021) that might seem simply an unintended by-product. The “right” kind of article (by the “right” kind of scholar from the “right” context) is admitted and the others are excluded (see also Valoyes-Chávez et al., 2021). This process allows the reviewer’s agenda, whether unconscious or not, to prevail. Thus, we continue to dilute the richness of local contexts, homogenise knowledge production in our field (Andrade-Molina et al., 2020), and maintain forms of exclusivity.

This finding is key to our argument and highlights the need for a more equitable approach to research evaluation, one that values diverse contexts and perspectives. Journals and reviewers need to recognise that all research is inherently local, and its relevance should not be measured in terms of its applicability to the dominant global discourse, considering this dominance may limit research. Bakker and colleagues’ recent survey noted “Several respondents expressed a concern that the current goals of mathematics education do not reflect humanity’s and societies’ needs and interests well” (Bakker et al., 2021, p. 7). We need new perspectives on what might be a “global” concern. We should expect *all* authors to articulate their research foci as distinct from and related to such re-defined global concerns. And we need a re-centring of the local as a concern in mathematics education research.

To achieve the above, an important first step would be for journals to have a diverse pool of reviewers and editors, and to continually update this pool. The challenges described in each theme suggest that this diversity needs to be linguistic, geographical, and epistemological/methodological. But it is also worth questioning how the pool is selected in the first place—it is typically drawn from those who have learned to play the publishing game, following the mainstream rules. Accordingly, the reviewers and editors need to be aware of their unconscious biases and journals may need to do considerable work, educating reviewers to ensure that the reviewing process constitutes a supportive and safe space.

Finally, university support plays a key role in enabling researchers to publish their work. Our survey reveals significant disparities in the level of support available to researchers from different regions. Researchers from the Global South often report limited access to resources, including funding for Open Access publishing and support in navigating the publishing process. ‘Publish or perish’ pressures exacerbate these inequalities (Valoyes-Chávez et al., 2021), particularly for scholars from less affluent institutions or countries. The expectation to publish in high-impact journals, which are often prohibitively expensive, adds to the challenges faced by these researchers (Andrade-Molina et al., 2020; Geiger et al., 2022). Furthermore, the lack of institutional support for language editing and translation services places an additional burden on non-native English speakers, who often must pay for these services out of their own pockets. We suggest disrupting this problem with the following solution: high-ranking journals could occasionally publish a special issue in a language other than English (e.g. Spanish). This way speakers of other languages may take advantage of the journal metrics without the disadvantage of English-medium publishing. There are certainly academics in our discipline who have the language (and other) expertise to serve as guest editors for this kind of issue.

Limitations

We must acknowledge a key limitation of our study; that is, the representativeness of our data. We do not know to whom or how many our recruitment process reached, and thus we cannot gain a sense of the proportion that responded. Our reach was limited to those in our networks, or who read JMTE editorials. This means we did not reach those who are less well-networked and likely more marginalised. We know our data lack representation despite the broad range of participant countries; for example, from Canada we received two responses only (compared with 77 from USA), there were very few participants from Asia, and many countries are not represented at all, despite 107 countries participating in ICME 13 (Gieger et al., 2022). It would be hard to know if we had achieved an *adequate* representation, yet it is easy to see when representation is *not* achieved in examples such as these.

Additionally, we chose not to ask for racial, gender, or other such identifications, and although the open-ended questions might have allowed for mention of related barriers, the responses were not very explicit on this (see also Wagner et al., 2020). Further research might more deliberately explore the impact of other identities on success in publishing. A final limitation we mention is that while the open-ended responses of our questionnaire enabled us to understand some of the nuance in barriers to publishing, potentially interview data could enrich our understandings further; this might be an area for future research.

Conclusion

The question framing our study was: What do voices from the mathematics education community raise in their responses to questions about publishing in English-medium research journals like JMTE? Our findings are consistent with our expectations and the existing literature that examines the globalisation of academic discourse and its impact on *all* scholars. This suggests that editors and experienced authors are aware of issues facing the underrepresented. However, we have yet to see any real change. This study's emphasis on the voices of the underrepresented not only highlights the hurdles they face, but also enriches our understanding of the nuances and multiple layers of exclusion within academic publishing. Language, location, and institutions work together to marginalise research and researchers. In addition, the insights into institutional constraints highlight the uneven levels of support available to researchers, which has a direct impact on their opportunities to contribute to the global pool of knowledge.

Further, our findings suggest that JMTE and other English language journals do indeed continue to create barriers for many authors. We suggest it is a responsibility of editors and editorial boards to act.

The discussion section outlined some actionable suggestions international journals may take to foster a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive publishing environment. They include:

- Ensuring there is a diverse and educated pool of associate editors, editorial boards, and reviewers, for example by providing webinars to potential reviewers on how to conduct sensitive reviews, that is, with a conscious effort to take on the author's perspective.
- Developing and improving language support systems for all potential authors, for example by considering free professional editing services to authors from the Global

South, and other marginalised regions, and particularly for those whose first language is not English.

- Deliberately increasing visibility of more local research interests, for example by: ensuring a diverse geographical representation of research contexts across issues, promoting indigenous scholarship, changing citation expectations to favour diversity rather than homogeneity within the journal, or strategic use of special issues.

By embracing changes in these directions, the research field can advance towards a more equitable and truly international scholarly environment that values and leverages the rich tapestry of languages and perspectives that scholars around the world bring to the global knowledge pool. However, this is just the first step. We must also continue our conversations, as called for by Mesa and Wagner (2019) and promoted at conferences (Brodie et al., 2024; Valoyes-Chávez et al., 2021), regarding how to make *systemic* changes to a process in which we are all complicit (Andrade-Molina et al., 2020) and yet remains inequitable; all the while enabling the journals to make enormous profits. Yet disrupting this enterprise will be no easy task. We call on the entire community, and ourselves, to take up this challenge.

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Conflict of interest One author, Nuria Planas, is one of the guest editors for the special issue we are submitting to. Other than this, the corresponding author confirms there is no conflict of interest on behalf of the authors.

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