

## INTERNATIONALITY OF ACADEMIC JOURNALS: A CASE STUDY WITH RELIEVE

[*Internacionalidad de revistas académicas: Un estudio de caso con RELIEVE*]

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### Abstract

We review the concept and criteria proposed to measure 'internationality' in academic journals. We apply these 'internationality criteria' to RELIEVE (*Electronic Journal of Educational Research, Assessment and Evaluation*). The data reviewed show that RELIEVE is actually an international journal.

### Keywords

Scholarly Journals; Electronic Journals; Electronic Publishing; Information Dissemination; Internet; Primary Sources; Users (Information).

### Resumen

Se revisa el concepto y los criterios propuestos en la literatura para establecer que una revista es 'internacional'. Se aplican posteriormente estos criterios a través de un análisis de las características de RELIEVE (la *Revista ELectrónica de Investigación y EValuación Educativa*). Los datos analizados permiten concluir que RELIEVE es plenamente una revista internacional.

### Descriptores

Revistas académicas; Revistas Electrónicas; Edición Electrónica; Comunicación de la Información; Internet; Fuentes Primarias.

The quality of a scientific journal is a polysemic and multidimensional concept, which is not calculated directly, but from a large group of signs: diffusion, quality editorial filters, impact, etc.

As far as diffusion is concerned, it should be noted that the purpose of any academic journal is to serve as a means of communication to the community that it serves. The greater this community, always in relative terms, the more chance there is that the investigations that it publishes reach a wider audience. There is also a greater chance that it will be useful to more people and, where

appropriate, it can be analyzed and criticized by more colleagues. For this reason "domestic" journals, for example, are published by a faculty, in which members of its teaching faculty and committees whose editors mostly belong to the same school usually have very little prestige and are little valued.

This context is where the journal acquired the importance of an 'international' aspect. While one must never confuse the terms of internationality and *quality*, opening a publication of a public (such as readers, authors and publishers) as broad as possible is a cer-

tain guarantee of transparency and influence in the community.

It should be noted that there is no clear definition of what is an 'international' journal. Searching the dictionary, we could learn that a journal is international when it affects two or more nations. But such a definition leaves too much in up the air: Does it refer to the two or more nations as they relate to the readers, the writers, the research, or where the journal is edited?

As we can see, the meaning of the internationality of a publication is somewhat diffuse, and does not depend solely on a single criterion. As of recently, Buela-Casal and his colleagues have been trying to develop and clarify this concept (Buela-Casal, 2001; Buela-Casal et al. 2006) by reviewing the various approaches proposed in the literature. Some of them are easily disposable (such as the inclusion of the word '*international*' in the title or possession of an Impact Factor calculated by the *Journal Citation Reports*, which are anecdotal in that they add nothing about the process or the product of the journal). Other deserve a more detailed analysis, which we will then try to apply it to the magazine RELIEVE.

## 1. Language in publishing

RELIEVE is a scholarly publication that publishes articles interchangeably in both Spanish and English, depending on how their respective owners write them. In recent years, we have been making a great effort to post bilingual editions of those articles that reach a wider distribution adding the translation into another language. For this work we have benefited from the invaluable collaboration of the staff of the *University of Virginia*<sup>[1]</sup>.

Considering the percentage of the world population that lives in countries that have these two languages as official languages according to Gordon (2005), we can say that we have as a potential audience some 890

million people who have English (508 million) and Spanish (382 million) as a first or second language.

If we went back to the definition of international ('two or more countries') we must point out that English is the official language of 64 countries and Spanish is the official language of the other 21 according to Gordon (2005). In other words, the magazine relates to at least 85 countries. These data should be added to the fact that English is the current '*lingua franca*' of science, and therefore its disposal in the academic community is even greater.

## 2. Country of Publication

The error of confusing '*international*' with '*foreign*' usually occurs frequently (Buela-Casal et al. 2006), and thus there are quite a few institutions that were more interested in a publication in, for example, a British or North-American journal than in a Mexican, Argentine or Spanish journal. In fact this is just a sample of certain 'cultural colonialism', and certainly the country publication does not add, *per se*, any quality to a journal.

In another instance, a particular publication is simultaneously edited in or for many countries. It is evident that this is the case of an electronic journal such as RELIEVE, given the immediacy in disseminating and its ability to cross over boundaries.

## 3. Inclusion in international databases

This approach, taken independently, is problematic, since the emergence of a journal in a particular database is that it does not make the publication 'international' overnight. However, the widespread dissemination of databases, particularly the most prominent, can provide greater diffusion of the journal in a large number of countries.

Therefore, although always in conjunction with other criteria, the inclusion of a publication in important databases and use in vari-

ous countries can bring new readers to the journal, so that it may indirectly contribute to internationalization. In this sense RELIEVE is included, among other databases and aggregators, in:

- Google Scholar (in the international and Hispanic version)
- DOAJ (Directory of Open Directory Journals- Sweden).
- ERA (Educational Research Abstracts – UK)
- EBSCO databases (USA).
- The selective Latindex Catalog (México), which only accepts publications with the highest standards of quality according to the famous Latindex criteria.
- *e-Revistas* (Spain): The database of open access journals CINDOC
- *Redalyc* (Network of Scientific Journals of Latin America and the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal - Mexico)
- Ulrich's Periodical Directory
- SOSIG (Social Science Information Gateway – UK)
- Other international indexes as Sociosite, ARL, ICAAP, NewJour, etc.

As we can see, there is little doubt about the diffusion of RELIEVE in international databases, although this is not a matter of all or nothing, but of gradation, and there is still unfinished business ahead to further develop this presence.

#### **4. Affiliation to an institution or international association**

Direct or indirect affiliation of a journal to an international institution raises a number of questions. The first concerns the fact that the word 'international' is very unclear when applied to associations as when applying it to the journals, and in many cases (-2001) they only reflect the claims of creators, more than describe their reality.

In any event, RELIEVE is sponsored by AIDIPE (Interuniversity Association of Pedagogical Research) which in turn is a

founding member of EERA (*European Educational Research Association*), the largest association of educational research in Europe and which brings together a wide variety of institutions of many countries.

#### **5. Multinational distribution of members of the Editorials Boards**

The fact that people from various countries contribute to the creation of the journal from the editorial aspects (either in the selection, reviewing, or advising phase) is a good sign, although not a guarantee, of the international opening of the journal.

The limitations posed in this approach have to do with the fact that possibly much of the names that appear have an honorary or "embellishing" purpose (Buela-Casal, 2001). Even in those cases one would have to consider that which represents the fact that the representatives of various countries agree to endorse its name with a particular publication.

In the case of RELIEVE we are pleased to have a Scientific Committee (which is responsible for "analyzing the editorial policy, establishing its goals and evaluating its performance") containing prestigious representatives from more than half a dozen countries (United States, UK, France, Russia, Australia, Spain).

#### **6. Multinational distribution of publishing partners**

Buela-Casal et al. (2006) considered this approach as secondary and subordinate to the previous one, which subsumes in its broadest sense. In addition, it may be the case, otherwise quite common in our society and which also includes RELIEVE, that for the moment, associate editors are not necessary because of the low complexity of the editorial process.

#### **7. Multinational distribution of authors**

This is probably the most clear and most widely used in literature to analyze the internationality of a journal. It is a good example of the opening of the editorial of the journal, as well as a proof of the interest awakened among authors of different nationalities.

RELIEVE can be proud to have received (and in its case, published) articles from Spain, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, Colombia, the United States, South Africa, Brazil, Guatemala, Netherlands, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Turkey, Uruguay, Portugal, Austria and Nigeria. It is, as can be seen, about a wide variety of multinational interest in publishing in RELIEVE.

This approach can be analysed not only from a qualitative perspective, but also quantitatively, including in the latter case absolute and relative approaches. Having made clear the internationality with regard to the origin

of the articles published in RELIEVE, we will reserve studies of this type for later.

## 8. Multinational distribution of users

It is an approach that has traditionally been difficult to measure, so there is little literature on this subject. However, one of the advantages electronic journals offer (Aliaga and Suarez, 2002) is the ability to gather information about the readers of the journal, including each article. In the case of RELIEVE, we have data since February 2003, provided by an external audit firm ([webstats](#), recently converted to [motigo.com](#)) that gives us data on the origin of the visits, however, at the cost of an awkward publicity.

We can see in Table 1 that the origin of visits to the homepage RELIEVE is concentrated mainly along the entire American continent and Europe. This has been, basically, our community goal since the birth of our publication.

TABLE 1 – Geographical zone of the origin of visits to the homepage RELIEVE

Geographical area	Visits	Percent
South America	125,800	39.0%
Central America	95,865	29.7%
Europe	70,853	22.0%
USA and Canada	17,362	5.4%
Asia	627	0.2%
Australia	517	0.2%
Africa	142	0.0%
Unknown	11,287	3.5%

Data [webstats](#) - June 21, 2007

In Table 2 we can see that the origin of the visits to the homepage of RELIEVE focuses primarily on Spanish-speaking countries, given the fact that Spain, the country of origin of the journal, is not even the country

that brings the most visits. The fact that 80% of visits are from countries other than the creator is an indication of further significance of the 'internationality' of RELIEVE.

TABLE 2 - Countries of origin of visitors to the homepage of RELIEVE

Order	Country	Visits	Percent
1.	Mexico	72,841	22.6%
2.	Spain	66,889	20.7%
3.	Venezuela	34,680	10.8%
4.	Argentina	20,320	6.3%
5.	Colombia	20,293	6.3%
6.	Chile	19,002	5.9%
7.	Peru	17,245	5.3%
8.	United States	16,777	5.2%
9.	Puerto Rico	10,286	3.2%
10.	Uruguay	8,172	2.5%
11.	Dominican Republic	3,002	0.9%
12.	Bolivia	2,881	0.9%
13.	Costa Rica	2,360	0.7%
14.	Guatemala	2,003	0.6%
15.	El Salvador	1,927	0.6%
16.	Panama	1,829	0.6%
17.	Ecuador	1,652	0.5%
18.	Portugal	1,263	0.4%
19.	Brazil	1,193	0.4%
20.	Cuba	974	0.3%
21.	Canada	585	0.2%
22.	United Kingdom	514	0.2%
23.	Australia	503	0.2%
24.	Nicaragua	400	0.1%
25.	Germany	385	0.1%
	The rest	14,477	4.5%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>322,453</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Data [webstats](#) - June 21, 2007

It should also be noted that there is a presence of a small, but not insignificant minority of non-Spanish-speaking countries. Foremost among these United States (*Top Ten*), but we cannot ignore the thousands of readers from Portugal, Brazil, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, etc.

## 9. Patterns of international collaboration

This criterion refers to the existence (and where appropriate, number) of articles that are written by authors from more than one country, as a demonstration of international

cooperation. This approach, however, depends not so much on the focus of the journal as on patterns of international collaboration that occur among researchers from a given area, in our case education, so that the test does not relate precisely to the characteristics of the journal. Abt (2007) has shown that the proportions of international collaboration vary greatly from some disciplines to others, so that it is nothing strange that the journals that serve as organs of communication to the various specialties submit results that are very different from one another.

Moreover, as the study of Abt (2007) has also verified, those items that simultaneously affect more than one country are more characteristic of studies that capture international collaboration. However, the focus of our magazine, education, has a marked social character, that is typical of each society and country, when coming strongly determined by the relevant laws, which makes it relatively far from conducive to international cooperation. Zitt and Bassecouard (2004) lists about 12 different factors that can affect the level of international collaboration in research and ranging from the existence of national policies, the existence of associations or international meetings, the mobility of researchers and a long list that has nothing to do with the editorial policy of a magazine.

Still, varied examples of articles published by authors from several countries can be found in RELIEVE, some as early as 1998 (a collaboration between South Africa and Spain) and the last, for now, in 2005, between a Spanish author and a Dutch author.

## 10. Online access

The idea that the Internet is the largest library in the world not to be repeated is less certain. The possibility of being able to access information from virtually anywhere in the world, at any time (*anytime, anywhere*) favours the rapid and broad dissemination of ideas that appear in it, giving a huge plus to the diffusion to the publications that use the internet as means of dissemination.

For all the aforesaid ideas, this is certainly the approach that is most suited to the characteristics of RELIEVE since it was born with a vocation to use new communication technologies, meaning the spread of the Internet.

## Conclusion

From the above analysis we proved that the concept of *internationality* of a publication is not, as it might seem naively, a dichotomous

concept, but rather it is a continuum. This construct is multidimensional, and could not be properly evaluated with a single approach. Instead, it requires a comprehensive analysis of a number of elements.

We conducted, as a case study, a detailed analysis in the case of the journal RELIEVE, having been very clear that because of its characteristics, for the interest aroused by its users (readers, authors, publishers) and its projection, an international publication.

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