

LANGUAGE SKILLS AND AFFECTIVE BARRIERS AS FACTORS INFLUENCING RESEARCH PRODUCTIVITY OF SCHOLARS IN BUSINESS DISCIPLINE IN POLAND

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Abstract:

Changing institutional regulations and increased competitiveness in academia impose strong pressure on scholars specialized in business to improve research productivity by publishing in international impact factor journals. Our knowledge about factors that leverage success of business scholars is very limited as prior research in this area was US-specific and limited in terms of scope (mostly based on publicly available secondary sources). We lack a comprehensive view of factors contributing to scientific success, e.g. from the perspective of management scholars themselves. This paper presents the results of explorative interviews conducted with management scholars based in Poland. The qualitative study suggests that both: English language skills (English language knowledge and English language communication skills) and affective predispositions (levels of inhibition, self-esteem, anxiety) strongly influence international research productivity. These all factors are also found as interrelated. The focus of this research was on Polish scholars, so results are not fully universal, however they are rather relevant for all post-communist European countries. To increase research productivity of scholars in business discipline, government and school authorities are recommended to pay more attention to language trainings for scholars and special incentives for international research networking.

Keywords: research productivity, business scholars, language skills, affective, academic networking

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays in many European countries changes concerning career development of scholars can be witnessed. These changes seem to modify the procedures connected with getting promoted, which, in case of scholars, usually means a better degree and better position. In order to be conferred the next degree in scholar's career, they now have to meet certain criteria that are more, less parallel in Europe. This, in turn, in some cases entails a complete change in somebody's professional routines, especially the ones associated with professional development expressed by publications and projects. Nowadays, in order to be successful, scholars need to develop in a variety of ways. According to Bergeron and Fen Liang (2007), success of a scholar can be manifested in four ways: by institutional recognition (salary, rank, tenure, and rate of promotions), teaching effectiveness (e.g. indicated by student evaluations), professional visibility (awards, editorial board positions, etc) and research productivity. An increasing number of governments are implementing elaborate research evaluation policies in order to boost research productivity of scholars (Onder and Onder, 2010; Hicks, 2009). Research productivity revolves around quality and number of publications that a given scholar produces. In this paper research productivity of a scholar is understood as a number of publications in impact factor journals since such publications are nowadays an indicator of success in the academia.

Poland is a country situated in Eastern Europe and due to such political reasons like, for instance, communist regime up to the beginning of the nineties, is not economically or institutionally as developed as so-called Western European Countries, like Germany, UK, or France. As far as success of scholars is concerned, for many years in Poland success of a scholar was understood as their recognisability in their local environment (e.g. their university, their country in a given area of research, etc) and the acceptance of their position by other scholars. The papers published were, in the majority of cases, monographs, local conference papers or articles in Polish journals in the field. They were written in Polish language and they were also based mainly on research carried out in Poland. The roots of the situation can be connected to the times of communist regime during which people's contact with western countries, western literature and English language was limited. The language taught at schools was Russian and this way Polish scholars of those times were not fully able to follow international literature concerning their field interests. People promoted at those times are already professors and, from that point of view, they do not need to develop further career. Younger generations of Polish scholars do not seem to have a straight path to follow since they cannot learn from the example of their older colleagues due to the change of political and promotional system. On the other hand, New Law of Scientific Degrees and Professor Title introduced in 2011 in Poland establishes new criteria for scientific and professional development, such as: publishing in impact factor journals (ISI), applying for and managing international research grants and acquiring postdoctoral positions at foreign universities. The lack of tradition concerning publishing in impact factor journals, together with the unification of promotional criteria in Europe, make it difficult for an average Polish scholar to be productive, and, as it has already been stressed, productivity is a major component of scholar's success. Some authors have come up with some factors influencing success of scholars in business area (Valle and Schultz, 2011; Bergeron and Fen Liang, 2007; Seggie and Griffith, 2009), but these studies were either just conceptual or limited in scope due to the fact that they used only publicly available secondary data sources. Thus, there is a lack of empirical studies exploring factors leveraging business scholars' productivity from the perspective of the scholars themselves. There also seems to be a gap concerning the fact that prior studies are specific to US academic culture with long tradition of publishing in top business/economic journals and dominating position in that area (Vitell and Rose, 2000; Kalaitzidakis *et al.*, 2003). Taking this all into consideration, this paper focuses on selected factors contributing to research productivity of business scholars based in Poland as representatives of management academia in Eastern Europe. Specifically, this paper is to investigate how such variables as the knowledge of English skills and affective factors influence success of Polish scholars.

2. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE AND EMOTIONS IN RESEARCH PRODUCTIVITY OF SCHOLARS

According to Stremersch and Verhoeh (2005), we can witness nowadays an increasing globalization of authorship in the marketing discipline and it brings such benefits as, for instance, diversity in the discipline. On the other hand, Seggie and Griffith (2009) draw reader's attention to the fact that institutional competition to retain and recruit marketing scholars capable of publishing in best marketing journals has intensified and this, in turn, may be perceived as threatening to some scholars

who are not very successful in publishing in good, international impact factor journals. Since academia is international, and the science is not national, but international as well, good impact factor publications are in majority of cases written in English language which is a lingua franca of our times. Onder and Onder (2010) and Stremersch and Verhoeh (2005) indicate that impact scores of ISI cover only journals written in English which vastly originate from the US and Great Britain, which, in turn, clearly shows that publishing in good journals is closely connected with the English language. The globalization of authorship requires from the authors of international papers good knowledge of English, so that they can communicate and share their views and ideas, write papers together and do literature review in English. In order to speak fluently and read and write advanced texts one needs to have above average English skills. The findings of Onder and Onder (2010) reveal that Turkish university departments that predominantly employed researchers which had been trained in North American universities published significantly more in indexed journals than before. They (Onder and Onder, 2010) additionally claim that those universities were better endowed with such resources necessary for publishing in indexed journals, as knowledge of theory, methodology and style expected in such journals. This implies that not only is the sole knowledge of English necessary to become a productive scholar, but also the knowledge concerning the expected writing style in relation to impact factor journals, appropriate theoretical background and methodology. The writing style is interconnected with a proper use of English and American or British-style scientific discourse, therefore researchers who have ever had an opportunity to do doctoral studies in one of those two countries, or who had an opportunity to get trained there seem to be much better predisposed to publish in impact factor journals. Furthermore, Onder and Onder (2010) indicate that researchers who graduated from British or North American Universities seem to be better networked with other (usually more advanced) foreign researchers in the field and this increases their chances to publish in indexed journals due to the experience, knowledge and recognisability of the more advanced scholars. Networking and teamwork require the knowledge of English on the side of the scholar, but additionally, it is connected with appropriate communication skills. What is more, also affective factors seem to play a role here, since some people are better fitted to communicate with others and work in teams than their colleagues. According to Brown (1994), such factors as, for instance, levels of inhibition and self esteem determine if a given person is willing to communicate in a foreign language (which, in case of scholars cooperating internationally, is English). Scholars must be willing to communicate in English in order to network with their more advanced colleagues and in order to establish a certain position in a prospective team. What is more, also the general levels of stress (Kyriacou, 2000) and anxiety (Brown, 1994) determine whether people are able to take risks, learn from their own mistakes and do not get demotivated by failures. Finding an appropriate publishing partner requires time, effort and courage since one can never know if they will be accepted by a certain group, whether a more recognizable scholar will accept them as partners, or whether their English is good enough to cooperate internationally. Speaking in a foreign language in public is likely to generate high levels of stress (Travers and Cooper, 1996), especially in a situation when a scholar is not very proficient. High levels of inhibition tend to hinder especially speaking skills and pronunciation (Guiora *et al.*, 1980). Scholars usually get to know one another at conferences or seminars where they present their findings, so we may assume that they want to attract prospective partners this way – by impressing them with their conference speech. Taking into consideration that they are to speak English which is not their native language, one could risk an assumption that the more inhibited ones, or the ones characterized by high anxiety levels, low self-esteem levels, or high levels of stress, will find it more difficult and, as a result, will probably perform worse which, in turn may affect their research productivity in a negative way since they will probably not attract the scholars they would like to cooperate with. Furthermore, the role of affective factors as the barrier of success of business scholars is increasing nowadays, since Miller *et al.* (2011) found that transformation of academic career model with strong "publish or perish" pressure model resulted in increased stress level and problematic research that may lack relevance, creativity and true innovation. As prior studies neglected to large extent the role of affective factors and English language skills in the productivity of scholars, the authors of this paper decided to explore this area through qualitative research conducted among Polish scholars specialized in business.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN POLAND

The research was qualitative in nature since such issues as emotions, one's ability to communicate with others, or one's evaluation of their own language skills, are very sensitive and tend to be, therefore quite difficult to name and understand. Qualitative researcher has an opportunity to be very close to the respondents what, in turn, ensures a deeper understanding of the investigated

phenomena and prevents from imposing artificial research categories on informants (Konecki, 2000, Gibbs, 2010). Since research productivity is defined by the authors of this paper as a number of articles published in impact factor journals (ISI list), the sample was purposive in character and was composed of most productive scholars in the business field in Poland. Hence the impact factor journals are in majority of cases published in English, it was assumed that those Polish scholars who are productive internationally must possess a good command of English. With the help of “publish or perish” software people with best Hirsch index were selected and then the journals in which they had published articles were analysed. If there were impact factor journals, the given scholar was invited to participate in the project. There were also some other scholars invited with high Hirsch index (5 or more), but no impact factor publications, recruited in order to validate the results and investigate whether those who are only recognizable nationally rate the role of language skills and personality factors in scholar’s productivity lower than the other group. The last invited group were scholars who neither had high impact factor publications, nor high Hirsch index, but who were identified as very determined to become productive and recognizable internationally (e.g. through frequent appearance at domestic and international conferences). The contact was initiated by email and then an interview was carried out via Skype, or personally if it was logistically possible. Not all selected scholars agreed to take part in the research (response rate around 50%), but finally 15 scholars participated in the project, eight of which already had some papers published in impact factor (ISI) journals. These scholars were all employed at major universities located in Poland in various geographical areas of the country. The highest Hirsch index among these scholars was 18 (according to Publish or Perish software) and the highest individual number of impact factor publications was 8. The interviews were carried out by one of the authors of the paper who is a qualitative researcher. An average interview took around 45 minutes. The scenario of the interview comprised 10 main questions with some additional questions that arose in the process of data collection whenever new issues worth investigating emerged, what is accepted in the reasoning according to the qualitative paradigm (Konecki, 2000). The issues tackled concerned the views of scholars on the importance of English language in the levels of research productivity, the role of cooperation with other scholars, ways of identifying the right scholars and strategies of initiating contacts with them and maintaining the relation. The questions were aimed at discovering whether the respondents found it difficult to network with other, usually foreign, scholars, whether they were able to find partners and initiate and maintain contacts with them and last, but not least, what they thought about the role of the knowledge of foreign languages in becoming productive. All interviews were recorded and then carefully transcribed. After that it was double coded by the authors in order to minimize interviewer’s bias (Krippendorf, 2004). The data was analysed and some theoretical propositions emerged as a result. The whole research procedure took 6 months.

4. MAIN RESEARCH RESULTS

The research was qualitative in nature and therefore its results are not presented in the form of numbers or graphs. Instead, some dominating tendencies that emerged during the coding process are described and elaborated on. At first the role of English language skills in scholar’s research productivity is discussed and after that the issue of affective factors in relation to the productivity is explained.

4.1. The role of language skills in leveraging the research productivity of Polish scholars specialized in business

Till the beginning of the nineties Poland had been for over 40 years under a communist regime and, as a result, borders were closed, scholars were not allowed to travel to western countries and language taught at schools was mainly Russian. For that reason Polish scholars of those times, who are now elderly professors, had a very restricted contact with international literature in the field and barely no travelling opportunities in order to perfect their methodological and language skills. This is illustrated by some examples from this research where oldest respondents, no matter whether internationally successful or not, claimed that good knowledge of English has a huge influence on research productivity and becoming successful. The most successful participant, who is one of the oldest participants said that:

“the knowledge of English language is enormously important. If networking is one of the most important tools of leveraging one’s productivity success, the knowledge of English and good language skills means networking to the power of four” (translation ours).

This person had an opportunity to go abroad, among other countries, to the United States and said that he became recognizable and productive mainly due to the fact that he went to the States, even though it was then extremely difficult for people, and had contact with international literature there and brought back to Poland loads of books and journals. He claims that he learnt everything in the States and that he was an only Polish scholar in the field that time, that had such an international experience. This way he became recognizable there and could publish good articles in foreign journals. It all required knowledge of English which he had had before and which was polished during his post-doctorate visit to the States. Among the scholars interviewed in this project who are over 60, he is the only person who can boast of international success. Other participants belonging to the age group between 61 and 70 also claimed that the knowledge of English, and especially an ability to write in English is important, but, at the same time, they expressed the opinion that success should not be measured only internationally, but nationally as well, because for them the academic success is being recognizable and accepted by domestic environment. This clearly shows that these scholars are to large extent only domestic oriented. They did not mention that language skills and communication were important but they had no impact factor publications, that suggests that good knowledge of English language skills and global orientation are rather crucial in becoming an internationally productive scholar. Of course, one should not imply that research productivity on a national level means not being successful at all, but in view of the intensification of the role of international, impact factor productivity, it should be stressed that national orientation does not help, but rather hinders productivity understood as impact factor publications.

In general, majority of respondents claimed that science is international and for that reason the knowledge of English is a key factor in research productivity. One of the respondents who did not use to know English in the past, and who is a successful scholar recognized internationally now, reported that he initiated his first contacts with foreign cooperants with the help of his English-speaking professional who prepared letters of invitation for him. Then this person step by step learnt English and now has high-quality impact factor publications, presents his research at international conferences in English and cooperates internationally. He states that he definitely would not be able to do it without the knowledge of English. This respondent prefers foreign cooperation and stresses the importance of internationalizing Polish science.

All respondents stress that it is not enough to know English in a sense that one can read or write in this language, a scholar should also be able to interact with others in English, critically analyse papers written in English and express themselves freely in contacts with foreigners. It is best summarized by a citation of a successful Polish scholar:

“The role of English is fundamental in developing one’s research productivity, without it [English] nothing significant can be achieved. One needs to read, write and speak in English in order to meet people in the [international] academia. There is no Polish science, the science is worldwide” (translation ours).

The conclusion is that successful and unsuccessful researchers are aware of the crucial role which the knowledge of English plays in boosting research productivity, but those less successful ones are not internationally oriented and they are elderly which supports the initial assumption that such national-specific factors like over 40 years of communist regime was a negative factor moderating the productivity (as it is defined nowadays). Most successful scholars interviewed are of the opinion that not only English itself, but English communication skills are fundamental and they are all globally-oriented. This allows for formulating a proposition that the knowledge of English and English communication skills (such as speaking, writing, reading, etc) is a key factor in leveraging research productivity of business scholars in Poland.

4.2. The role of affective factors in leveraging research productivity of Polish scholars specialized in business

The role of affective domain in private and occupational life of people is undeniable (Brown, 1994) and there are many detailed affective factors that have been identified by researchers so far, but in this paper it was assumed that research productivity is leveraged especially by factors referring to scholar’s abilities concerning initiating contacts and maintaining cooperation with other scholars and factors that are affective in nature, but closely connected with using a foreign language. Indeed, as a result of the project, few factors emerged. These are inhibitions, self-esteem and anxiety in relation to communicating in English with other people.

As far as inhibitions and self-esteem are concerned, they are going to be elaborated on together since they are closely-connected. One of the interview questions revolved around barriers of cooperation and among enumerating other barriers, such as, for instance, lack of money to go to a conference and lack of time due to heavy teaching workload, nearly all respondents said that certain personality traits may make it difficult for a scholar to cooperate with other people. In majority of cases the participants said that some people are not able to initiate contacts with others because they are too shy, too anxious, or they do not believe in themselves. Such thinking is associated with high levels of inhibition and low levels of self-esteem. When one's self-esteem is low, they are not likely to believe in their capabilities of attracting another person to do research with them, they do not show initiative and they often lack courage to approach an unknown scholar in order to propose cooperation.

The least successful scholars among those that we interviewed in Poland claimed that cooperation starts if somebody invites us to it: *"if a given person hears me speaking at a conference and they think my research is interesting, they may want to invite me to his team"* (translation ours). This quotation indicates that scholars who are not open and initiative do not tend to initiate cooperation what does not contribute to their research productivity. When it comes to an interview question referring to difficulties in initiating contacts with other researchers in the field, the respondents enumerated such factors as inability to speak in English, or the fear of speaking in English even though one can read and write in this language. It may be connected with the level of self-esteem relating to one's knowledge of foreign languages, their inhibitions referring to it, or their language anxiety which is another affective factor worth tackling in the context of research productivity. High levels of anxiety correlate strongly with one's unwillingness to speak in a foreign language and socialize with foreigners. People who are inhibited and characterized by high anxiety levels are afraid of making mistakes, do not try to learn through a process of trial and error, and this way lessen their chances of initiating and maintaining relations. Even successful scholars tend to fear situations in which they are to speak in English in front of native speakers of this language. When they talk to other foreigners of non-English speaking country origin, they feel more comfortable since they feel they are more, less in the same shoes. One of the respondents claimed:

"the lack of [foreign] language barriers helps to be productive, the lack of fear to speak in English. I don't have such barriers when I go to Holland to teach because the Dutch are not native speakers of English. When I go to the States to take part in a conference, I'm able to break the barriers I have. One needs to accept that they may not understand everything that American scholars say, it's obvious. The ability to present one's own research at conferences and answering the follow-up questions of Americans ... It is greater challenge if we use their native language in those interactions" (translation ours).

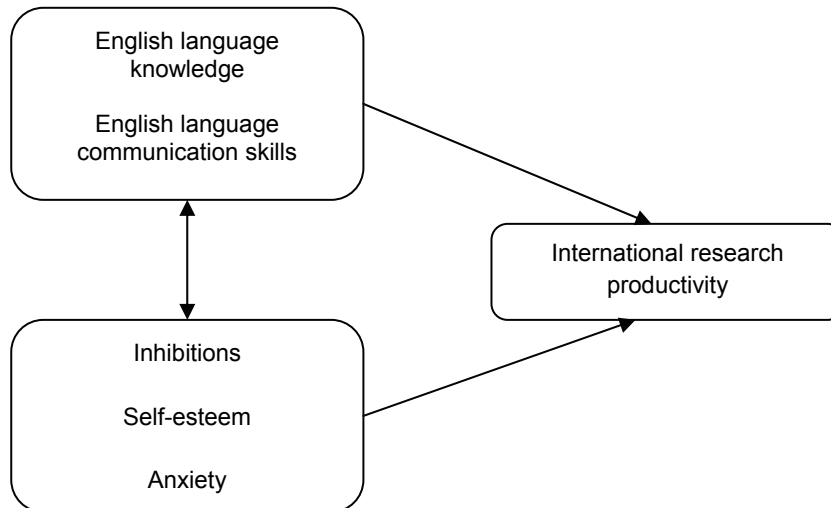
A tendency that emerged here is that more successful research participants were more willing to initiate contacts and approach their foreign colleagues than those successful just at the national level. Those less successful respondents more often mentioned that some personal factors may be barriers to cooperation and that it is a challenge to communicate in English. This all suggests that such affective factors as self-esteem, inhibitions and anxiety play a significant role in leveraging scholars' research productivity. What is more, all those factors moderate communicative competence of foreign language speakers. With poor communicative competence, scholars are not likely to initiate and maintain beneficial relations. When asked what to do in order to ensure good relations in the teams they work with, all interviewed successful scholars claimed that they have emotional, close relations with their partners on a friendly level – they not only cooperate professionally, but sometimes spend holidays together, exchange birthday wishes and cultivate those friendships they made for occupational reasons.

"I have close relations with all my cooperants, I know what their children do, how their spouses are and when they have birthday. I cannot imagine working with people I don't like. If people in the team like one another, the atmosphere is fantastic" (translation ours).

As it can be seen, the issues of English language skills and some affective factors are crucial in leveraging scholar's research productivity, what is more, there is a mutual influence between them. The levels of inhibitions, self-esteem and anxiety exert an influence on people's willingness to speak a foreign language in front of others and, simultaneously, one's knowledge of a foreign language mediates their emotions associated with speaking it. The research results clearly showed that the most successful participants were more globally than nationally oriented when it comes to cooperation, they were of the opinion that the knowledge of English skills is fundamental for research

success and they valued close interpersonal contacts with their research partners. The respondents who were not productive internationally, were of the opinion that it is better to be found by a potential partner than look for them on one's own, they also claimed that initiating contacts and cooperating with foreigners can be stressful and difficult for some people. The tendencies that emerged support the initial assumption of the authors of this paper that English language skills and affective factors play a significant role in leveraging the success of scholars manifested by research productivity relating to good, impact factor publications. The interrelations between constructs that we focus on in this research are illustrated by picture 1.

Picture 1: Lingua - Affective stimulators of Research Productivity of scholar specialized in business



5. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the fact that academia is international and criteria of professional development of scholars have been largely unified, a need to define research productivity and discover factors contributing to it has emerged. In this paper it has been argued that research productivity in contemporary academia understood internationally, can be defined as a number of impact factor papers (from ISI list). Unfortunately, due to barely no access to international literature and hardly no tradition of English teaching at schools up to the beginning of the nineties, the average international research productivity of Polish scholars specialized in business is much lower than scholars from so-called Western Countries, e.g. US or UK. Nowadays, with the unified promotional criteria in the European academia, Polish scholars, especially younger ones, need to meet criteria that are perceived by many of them as ones impossible to fulfill. There are some exceptions – scholars with impact factor publications who cooperate internationally and who can serve as a good example to follow. The research that was carried out proved that such factors as the knowledge of English language skills and affective variables relating to scholar's willingness to initiate and maintain contacts with others and speak English even in front of native speakers of this language, leverage the research productivity of Polish scholars. Nowadays the borders are open and Polish scholars can move freely and learn from their western colleagues. The thing that hinders their mobility, however, is the fact that there is no tradition of doing so in Polish academia. Young scholars in majority of cases cannot learn from their mentors, because in the past there were different criteria and definitions of academic success. On the one hand, they need to obey the rules set by their older workmates because the changes at the academia in Poland are very gradual, on the other hand, they know that in order to get promoted and develop, they need to follow somehow "the western path of academic success". As a result, they need to work out their own ways of boosting their research productivity and this is likely to generate some unnecessary emotions. Since those people need guidance, they should learn from their colleagues who are most successful, which means most productive, in the field. It is recommended that inexperienced scholars should, first of all, invest time and money in English language education in order to become proficient users of this language. The representatives of younger generation of Polish scholars on average tend to have a good command of English, which, however, should be polished whenever possible. Additionally, the authorities of Polish universities and Polish government should find resources which would make it possible for scholars to go abroad more often in order to find

research partners. Individual scholars, apart from polishing their English, should intensively look for opportunities to internationalise their research by multinational cooperation.

The qualitative research was carried out in Poland, so the findings are not internationally universal. However, lingua - affective stimulators of research productivity discussed in this paper can relate to other countries, especially those in the area of Eastern Europe as well. Specifically, these research findings are rather relevant for all post-communist countries, including: Russia, Ukraine, Visegrad Countries and post-Soviet Baltic Countries.

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