

Letter to the Editor

## **An argument for scientific writing in the nation's Colleges of Health Sciences**

Thomas Syre <sup>1</sup>, Ayalu Aklilu Reda <sup>2</sup>

Conducting well-designed health-related research and then presenting it clearly and accurately is a challenge. Clear language usage, correct citation presentation, and proper style and formatting require not only expert knowledge in the health discipline but also good writing skills.

In Ethiopia, in particular, thesis proposals and theses in health sciences are written in English. Although students in Ethiopia have been studying English since primary school, the writing skills of many university students both at the undergraduate and graduate levels seem at best only fair. Baccalaureate research projects and master's theses are often written with multiple misspellings, unclear statements, long and often confusing sentences and with serious problems. Old citations and incomplete references are common. These problems, on occasions, are seen in published extracts as well.

A concerted effort at language improvement is needed at the public health college level where students can be expected to learn their discipline and also strengthen their writing abilities.

### **A major effort is required throughout Ethiopia's Colleges of Health Sciences to improve the writing performance of students.**

Scientific writing should be a requirement of all students early in their course of study in the health sciences colleges. A scientific writing course can provide a minimum of a review of the English language with grammar, spelling, sentence and paragraph structure, and any expected university document formatting. This course is needed along with the skills of critical thinking.

Also, scientific writing should be emphasized by the health college academic staff members as they function in teaching and student-advisory capacities. Staff members can assist the students by paying more attention not just to the content of the work, but also to the language usage of theses, term papers, and other written documents.

Documents submitted by students should be closely examined from the title page to the last reference or appendix. Staff can check for spelling, clarity in expressing ideas, required university formatting, and correct citations and, importantly, current and complete web-based and hard copy references. This takes additional time for staff members, but it is a significant and essential learning experience for students in their language and professional development.

Aside from a course for all students, to improve the current writing situation at the colleges of health sciences, in-service language education could be provided for staff members who need the assistance in this area. On-going in-service education sessions by skilled English language educators can be conducted. The commitment by university administrators to provide the necessary expert language personnel is needed for the enhanced language skills of staff members.

We call upon academic staff members, department heads, college deans, and mid-level and senior university administrators to pay more serious attention to English language usage in our Colleges of Health Sciences at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. Students need to be encouraged, and more needs to be done. Those who are able should allocate the necessary resources to scientific writing as it affects the quality of education and scientific output by the country.

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<sup>1</sup>

Visiting Volunteer Guest and Associate Professor of Public Health, MPH Program, Harar Campus, College of Health Sciences, Haramaya University, Haramaya, Ethiopia;

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Lecturer, Department of Public Health, Haramaya University, Haramaya, Ethiopia