# A Study to Explore Strengths and Weaknesses of Existing Practices and Procedures of HEC Approved Journals

Dr. Zaheer Ahmad[1], Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood[2]

**Abstract**

Higher Education Commission (HEC) introduces a lot of initiatives to promote and strengthen research culture in Pakistan. Though opportunities provided by HEC for conducting and dissemination of research are substantial yet it does not bring the desired targets of that research that is bring to quality change in the system of education and application of that research to improve the practices of different departments that is the reason the study was conducted to investigates to what extent HEC envisioned policy of strengthening and disseminating research culture in universities is on the track. The design of the research was descriptive. For this survey was conducted by using an instrument consisted of 25 statements on 5-point Likert scale and an open ended question. After validation and piloting it was sent via google form to 300 potential respondents as well as personally administered to Federal University. The results of one sample t-test and independent sample t-test revealed that participants are very dissatisfied and critical about the practices and procedures of HEC approved journals. Respondents were very critical about the practices and procedures of HEC approved journals and they declared them as defective, biased, compromising, non-transparent, improper, hard, personalized, unfair, damaging teaching, fake and wastage of time.

**Keywords***:* HEC approved journals, practices and procedures, quality

**Introduction**

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are recognized for conducting and disseminating research which contributes and improving practices, procedures and policies in the concerned field of a country. That is why Higher Education Commission (HEC) focused on producing quality research through the facilitation of organizing conferences and publication of research journals in Pakistan. Though opportunities provided by HEC

---

[1] Lecturer, Department of Distance, Non-Formal and Continuing Education, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad

[2] Dean, Faculty of Education, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad

for conducting and dissemination of research are substantial yet it does not bring the desired targets of that research that is bring to quality change in the system of education and application of that research to improve the practices of different departments. The research investigates to what extent HEC envisioned policy of strengthening and disseminating research culture in universities is on the track.

Moreover, since its establishment in 2002, HEC started taking initiative to develop and strengthen the research culture in Pakistan. In total, it took 22 initiatives through Research and Development Wing (HEC, 2017) of a variety of type to support research endeavor. As a result of that Pakistan ranked 46th in research producing countries and in 2018 Pakistan improved highest 22% of all countries than its previous position in research publications. As a result of that initiatives, the articles published by Pakistani institutions were increased by 687 percent from 1985 to 2015. Thus, there was sufficient evidence that Pakistani universities and their researchers wrote a lot of publications, yet questions were raised about their quality. It seemed that objective of HEC to translating research for the public benefit was not achieved. No doubt, HEC played a vital role in enhancing the pace of research culture and supporting researchers to concentrate on its beneficial and long lasting impact on the society. Yet, race to publish more research due to promotion or other reasons affected the quality of research as perceived by Ahmed (2017) in which concern was shown that we have produced enough researcher with low quality and plagiarized writings and it is time to produce quality work. The same issues of quality not the quantity was expressed at international level two.

OSI Global (2016) "The quality problem has reared its head in ways that price could not have anticipated. Mainstream scientific leaders increasingly accept that large bodies of published research are unreliable".

Earlier after HEC initiatives to strengthen research culture, research culture was explored by different researchers Lodhi (2012) and Iqbal, Jalal and Mahmood (2018).

Thus, it was reasonable and need of hour to investigate the practices and procedures of HEC approved journals and to find-out what the strengths and weaknesses of these practices and procedures. This way helps in determining the quality of published research and if found poor, it may be put on the right direction by taking certain steps.
**Research Question**

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of existing practices and procedures of HEC approved journals as perceived by stakeholders?

## Hypotheses of the Study

Following are the null hypotheses of the study.

1. There is no significance difference between male and female participants regarding existing practices and procedures of HEC approved journals.
2. There is no significant difference between participant with large number of publications and less number of publications regarding practices and procedures of HEC approved journals.

## Significance of the Study

The study will potential contribute in existing literature on research culture in Pakistan by informing stakeholders and policy and decision makers as reconsider and revisit the HEC journals publication policy and it will be a step toward establishing a transparent policy.

## Delimitations of the Study

1. Limited to only education and social science journals of *X* and *Y* categories.
2. Only authors not the editors point of view regarding publication has been explored.

## Design of the Study

Design of the research was descriptive. For this survey was conducted by using an instrument.

## Sample

Sample consists of 73 researchers (faculty members, M.Phil and PhD scholars).

## Instrument Development

By using a questionnaire consisting of 25 statements on 5-point Likert scale and one open ended question. The instrument was developed by following the guidelines regarding ethics and research quality developed by HEC (HEC, n.d). Initially the instrument consisted of 30 items and one open response question which was validated by five experts and then it was administered for piloting. After validation and piloting 6 statements were omitted and one was included and two were revised. As a result of that final instrument consisted of 25 statements and one open ended question. Instrument consisted of two scales i.e. practices (11 statement, α

= .720) and procedures (14 statements, α = .893). High score on the instrument show satisfaction and strength of the practices and procedures whereas low score on the instrument show adverse views of the participants about the phenomena. The reliability of the instrument was 0.897.

**Procedure of Data Collection**
The instrument was administered through *google form* by taking the email addresses of the target population approximately 300 participants (PhD faculty, PhD and M.Phil scholars of higher education institutions (8 public universities of Punjab and 1 Federal university). It was also administered to the faculty of Federal university personally. The response rate in the personally administered instrument was 90% and in online administration 22%.

**Results**
Following are the results of the inferential statistics.

**Table 1**
*One Sample t-test for Comparing Respondents Perceptions against Test Value i.e. 75*

|  | N | Mean | SD | *t* | *df* | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Practices and Procedures | 73 | 70.23 | 14.90 | -2.73 | 72 | .008 |

Table 1 reveals that *t* value -2.73 (Mean = 70.23, df = 72) is significant at p=.008 against in favour of test value. It suggests that respondents on most of the statements are either neutral or disagree with practices and procedures of the HEC approved journals.

**Table 2**
*Independent Sample t-tests on Gender Differences regarding Practices*

|  |  | N | Mean | SD | *t* | df | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Practices | Male | 34 | 30.76 | 6.55 | .997 | 67 | .486 |
|  | Female | 35 | 29.29 | 5.76 |  |  |  |

Table 2 shows that there is no significant difference between male and female perceptions/ satisfaction level regarding practices suggesting that both are not satisfied with the above mentioned phenomena as *t* value = .99 (df = 67) as *p* = .486 (Male, M= 30.76, SD = 6.55 and Female, M = 29.29, SD = 5.76).

**Table 3**

*Independent Sample t-tests for Comparing Means of Faculty and Non-faculty regarding practices*

|  |  | N | Mean | SD | $T$ | df | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Practices | Faculty | 41 | 29.93 | 7.06 | .240 | 60 | .014 |
|  | Non-Faculty | 21 | 29.52 | 4.20 |  |  |  |

Table 3 indicates that there is significant difference between faculty and non-faculty perceptions/ satisfaction level regarding practices and procedures suggesting that faculty as compare to non-faculty comparatively a little bit more satisfied as compare to other counterparts. The *t* value = .240 (df = 60) as *p* = .014 (Faculty, M= 29.93, SD = 7.06 and Non-faculty, M = 29.52, SD = 4.20).

**Table 4**

*Independent Sample t-tests for Comparing Means of Faculty and Non-faculty regarding Procedures*

|  |  | N | Mean | SD | $t$ | df | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Procedures | Faculty | 39 | 39.67 | 12.16 | -.382 | 57 | .024 |
|  | Non-Faculty | 20 | 40.80 | 7.30 |  |  |  |

Table 4 shows that non-faculty (M.Phil, PhD scholars and other personnel) is more satisfied with the procedure of HEC as compare to faculty perhaps interpretation is that they regard HEC as a high caliber institution and their direct linkages with HEC made it reasonable to believe positively about their procedures (such as degree attestation) or may be have not got experience of writing for and sending publications to journals. The *t* value = -.382 (df = 57) as *p* = .024 (Faculty, M= 39.67, SD = 12.16 and Non-faculty, M = 40.80, SD = 7.30).

**Table 5**
*Independent Sample t-tests on Respondents Satisfaction Level by Number of Publications regarding Procedures*

|  |  | N | Mean | SD | $t$ | df | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Procedures | Less than 10 | 51 | 39.78 | 11.21 | -.465 | 62 | .045 |
|  | More than 10 | 13 | 41.31 | 7.19 |  |  |  |

Table 5 reveals that analysis for compares the respondents, (with more than 10 and less than 10 publications) satisfaction level regarding procedures. The table reveals that respondents with larger publications

have more positive and satisfied view point regarding procedures as compare to their counterparts as *t* value is significant in favour of them. As *t* value = -.465 (df = 62) as *p* = .045 (less than 10, M= 39.78, SD = 11.21 and more than 10, M = 41.31, SD = 7.19). This reveals that through practice again and again they have now understood the procedures of HEC approved journals.

## Findings

Respondents were very critical about the practices and procedures of HEC approved journals and they declared them as defective, biased, compromising, non-transparent, improper, hard, personalized, unfair, damaging teaching, fake and wastage of time. Some of the views expressed by participants are as under:

> "Publications attached with promotion and degree made it a race and malpractices are seen in publication process more authors. Less approved journals for the purpose is being issue creating negative situation".

> Another participant expressed his/her views as:

> "The criteria is very subjective in nature and editors of the journals published articles on their own relationship and preference. The procedure of teaching community selection for different posts should be reviewed. Even an excellent research document and researcher could not published in local HEC recognized journals unless he has not good relations with the editors of journals. Need to modify the process and make it more effective".

> **One participant wrote:**

> "I was not able to get my article published for quite a long time to earn a degree. Then, one Professor of a public university came to UK *(pseudo name)* on Postdoc fellowship and stayed with me for sometime, impressed on my hospitality, he offered and then made it possible to get my article published in the next issue".

## Recommendations

1. Higher Education Commission should reconsider its promotion and tenure track policy for which publications are required.
2. HEC should revisit the number of publications criteria for promotion rather it should develop/ establish a mechanism that

consist of quality teaching and quality research which has practical significance to strengthen any educational social or other aspect of the society.

3. HEC should explore to rigorous analysis that research articles are published as per HEC envisioned policy presented in the HEC guidelines (HEC, n.d).

4. In future, such mechanism be developed that researchers are bound to produce quality not the quantity.

## Limitations of the Study

Convenient sampling and small sample size do not permit us to make generalizations. However, the findings of the study are substantial enough to inform policy makers and to support stakeholders to revisit their policy regarding article publications and strengthening research culture.

## References

Ahmed, M. Z. (2017). Enough quality: Time to focus on quality of researchers in Pakistan. *International Higher Education, 91*, 24-25.

HEC (2017). *R&D programmes and support initiatives policy handbook.* Islamabad: Research and Development Division, Higher Education Commission. Retrieved from http://hec.gov.pk/english/services/universities/nrpu/Documents /RnD%20 HEC%20Policy%20Book.pdf

HEC (n.d). Ethical guidelines for journals. Retrieved from http://www.hec.gov.pk/ english/services/faculty/SSAH/Documents/JCR/HEC%20Appro ved%20Ethical%20Guidelines.pdf

Iqbal, M., Jalal, S., & Mahmood, M. K. (2018). Factors influencing research culture in public universities of Punjab: Faculty members' perspective. *Bulletin of Education and Research, 40*(3), 187-200.

Lodhi, A. S. (2012). A pilot study of researching the research culture in Pakistani public universities: The academics' perspective. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences, 31,* 473-479.

OSI Global (2016). The pressure to publish pushes down quality: Nature News & Comment. Retrieved from http://osiglobal.org/2016/05/25/the-pressure-to-publish-pushes-down-quality-nature-news-comment/