



Creating an Academic Elite

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Abstract: This paper is written with an intention to discuss the contentious issues of publishing and publication in Pakistani universities and institutes. Academics pursuing research careers are required to share their research findings to establish their identity in an academia. These research articles help to measure the productivity of researchers, departments and universities. In this context, the factors contributing to quality research are: promotion, university policy, researcher's responsibility, peer reviewing, journal guidelines, and HEC rules. The article discusses all these factors and also throws light on ethical issues related to publication and promotion. The actors involved in the creation, production and dissemination of knowledge, have to contribute positively to raise standards in quality research. The article concludes with certain recommendations for the stakeholders involved in the process.

Key words: Academic, Research, Quality, Publication, Promotion.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education and academic practices present a very serious and challenging scene today. Twenty years back academic consciousness and activities were dormant and at rest. Entry into new millennium proved to become the renaissance for research and the academia in Pakistan. Academic practices vary from country to country and university to university. Affiliation with certain practices and university define a person's professional's identity and standing in the world of research and teaching. The tasks, like making connections, building research societies, developing healthy research habits and practicing ethics pertaining to research, are highly integrative, which develop and change according to the needs of the time. The feature that distinguishes university from various institutes is the production or creation of knowledge. Presumably, the performance of the university depends on the research quality and number of publications. Promotion in academia in Pakistan is closely linked to the number of publications of an academic. Central to an academic's identity a trajectory is an investment in the research projects and publications. It is important that academics affirm their commitment with their own development and that of their institute. Academia, in Pakistan, is moving forward in the direction to confirm to the international standards of scholarly publication and creating opportunities for the

enthusiastic professionals who intend to learn visioning processes and ethical guidelines in maintaining healthy scholarly record.

Objectives:

- To identify the factors that affect quality publication in Pakistani academia.
- To explore and establish possible solutions that help to produce original research.
- To establish and assist in creating a body of knowledge that could make a difference.

Research Questions:

- What are the factors affecting quality research in Pakistani academia?
- How to set priorities to avoid low-grade research?
- What role HEC (Higher Education Commission) can play to ensure that research evidence and work is original?

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of current research is to add considerable and significant value to the area, which is being explored in the research project. A qualitative research paradigm is adopted for the current study. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006) in qualitative research, the researcher learns from the participants the meaning of human experiences.

Several seminars and workshops now-a-days highlight glaring loopholes in research publications since, the material is rarely original and the information mass is re-phrased and re-ordered to give a look of original publication. Furthermore, the research articles getting easily published in an online journal charge high fee, which is, generally, shared amongst the contributors. This is a common picture of any Pakistani university or institute. The problem has become so rife in public universities that it has taken up the shape of publishing mafia, which easily controls and manipulates the publication of research articles.

The contributors of this research article have come across all the difficulties mentioned above. In this context, interaction with concerned (Journal editors, University officials) persons made the problem more consequential and severe. It needed a platform to report serious violations of research ethics. The contributors surveyed articles on research ethics and thematically analyzed them to bring the illegal practices to the fore for reforms. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), "thematic analyses is a method used for identifying and analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data". Therefore, the next section would discuss in detail the themes that are being uncovered during this survey.

DISCUSSION

Academic practice centers on teaching, research and administration or both, with the independence of Pakistan, University Grants Commission was set-up to fund and run the universities as per norms of the time. The role of University Grants Commission (UGC) for the first fifty or more years was not effective enough for knowledge production. It lacked viable leadership for monitoring the progress of teachers and researchers and no structured policy for professional development of career academics in terms of positions, responsibilities, promotion and awards, was formulated. Higher Education Commission (HEC) was founded in 2002, during Musharraf era, under the leadership of Dr. Atta ur Rahman. Clearly, the performance of HEC has been quite impressive in terms of increase in the number of universities, Ph.D scholars and research publications. However, some leading scholars and intellectuals have serious reservations regarding the quality of research produced in last thirteen years. They feel that the academics have produced substandard research, which is not a constructive contribution to the body of knowledge. There have also been fund embezzlement and plagiarism scandals reported from various research institutes and universities. Contesting such allegations and highlighting its performance former Executive Director, Sohail Naqvi, said, "They (HEC) had made a spread of higher education to every region of Pakistan with an increase in number of universities campuses in Pakistan from 168 to 258, including the establishment of 41 new universities, increase in

student enrollment at universities from 330,000 to over a million, increase in enrolled women in universities from 36% to 46%, award of more than 10,000 local and foreign scholarships through a well-defined and transparent mechanism without any compromise on merit, award of 2,000 scholarships for the talented youth of Balochistan and FATA, and launch of additional 600 MPhil/PhD scholarships exclusively for the students of Balochistan". In the same vein former HEC Chairman, Javed Laghari said, "The number of research publications, from Pakistan, has gone up by 50 percent in the last two years alone". Scimago, an independent database, has projected that Pakistan will have the second-highest growth in the Asiatic region, moving up 16 notches from the current worldwide ranking of 43 to 27 (Laghari, 2012).

Multiple issues and debates surround academic life and practices at institutional or university level. Post-PhD phase determines future directions, that are highly impacted by the policies set by administrators and educational researchers. Central to this phase are the actions, activities, and the choices that determine the future course of the professionals. In Pakistani institutes, the academic dynamics are not a simple phenomenon. Research and teaching policies may vary from university to university, but overall the system lacks holistic and integrative approach in matters concerning policy application. Matters, like publications, promotions and research supervision, at times become contentious issues. The categorization of publication into impact factor, X, Y and Z journal, affects the academic climate. This situation leaves academics with the option to become a part of rat race run to secure promotions and establish a name in an academy. Impact factor journals follow a tedious route and the faculty may not have the patience to endure referring and "correction exercises", which may take months before publication takes place. Access to online journals further complicates the matter. Committed to speedy publication, with enticing names and charging a handsome publication fee is the striking feature of these journals. Interestingly, some these journals do enjoy good reputation.

The striking feature of Post-PhD experience is research and variation in position and responsibilities. Highlighting teachers' reservations, president of the Karachi University Teachers Society, Prof. Jamil Kazmi said that the HEC coming policy to impose a five and eight year limit for post-PhD experience, for the posts of Associate Professor and Professor, was unfair. "According to this policy, a PhD holder would wait for five years after completing his/her PhD even if the person meets other criteria for the same post (The Daily DAWN, 2015). The emergence of HEC has led to the establishment of consumer society, where knowledge becomes like an object on sale. The concept of "Knowledge economy" is also an emergent form of capitalism, in which knowledge is commoditized as an item produced and exchanged.

The academic institutes, colleagues, and an academic regulatory body, like HEC, expect, “budding academics set up their bona fides, develop research independence, create a name for themselves, develop the ability to gain research grants in their own right and show whether they have the ability to move into an academic career” (Åkerlind, 2005). The semester system and the excessive workload for the faculty, supervision of master’s degree students, class teaching put teachers in great dilemma. “Faculty ‘busyness’ could be understood through the many studies that have examined their ever-intensifying workloads” (Acker, 2003). This adversely affects the research productivity of faculty members and consequently, unfair to expect from overloaded faculties to publish articles for promotion and awards at national and international level. This race for academic identity or recognition leaves many academics complaining about the promotion issues and awards.

The problem in academia surfaces with the linkage between publication and promotion. The networking strands lead one to get the number of publications fulfilled and also a good source of income and grants. Sometimes the collision of interest occurs between an academic and an organization. Responsibilities like teaching, supervision, administration and being a member of multiple committees may not allow an individual to publish on regular basis affecting their intellectual capacity and devastating their development. There have been reports of experiencing tension when publication ethics is violated by senior/influential faculty members. It is also observed that senior academics also get published in the journals, which are interested in revenue generation only. Using their authoritative position, they fulfill the requirement of completing the number of publications needed for promotion. As Richard Smith has noted, “A pure editor concerned with science and quality while a grasping publisher bother purely with revenue and profit” (Smith, 1999). It is so common to find multiple online journals, publish articles with explicit and implicit errors in the language and philosophy of research papers. This trend of adding multiple authors (known as gift, guest, and honorary authorship) have always been a part of research climate and especially in promotions, salary raise, awards, funding, etc. Publications of this nature have serious repercussions for the university and may lead to serious misconduct of the researcher, bringing bad name to the university. According to Kempers (2002), “these coauthors may not recognize flaws in the papers”. The quality of the paper and the reputation of the journal are compromised for financial gains.

Practices of this kind bring down the quality and standard of research. Commercialization of research papers is now rife in Pakistani institutes and universities. In this context, Kempers (2002) rightly remarks, “First, it is unethical to publish bad science.

Second, it is unethical to fail to publish good and important science; and third, it is unethical to give credit to the wrong people”. In the same vein Hoodbhoy (2012) asserts, “So once the PCST and HEC announced cash awards and other perks, almost overnight a research-poor country started producing a bumper crop of ‘research articles’ year after year. The HEC claimed victory but many papers were tired repetitions, contained fake data, were plagiarized, or published in fly-by-night journals”. Furthermore, he adds in another article, “The new policy—which required learning how to play the numbers game—had the effect of turning many professors into crooks and thieves” (Hoodbhoy, 2013). Same is the case with Social Sciences and Humanities as well. This chain of authorships does not end here. Interestingly, laboratory fellows, research supervisors, laboratory supervisors and head of the departments also expect that they play the role of coauthors in the research production. Dissemination of questionable material then becomes a serious problem for those professionals who treat research as a holy and respectable vocation. Feeling the pressure strongly, Kempers (2002) notes, “there is the intense pressure to publish felt by investigators—the publish or perish phenomenon—in which academic promotion and accessibility to funding are based on publication. This has the potential to result in a spectrum of irregularities varying from benign to more malignant forms of deception.” Wager (2015) proposes that “closer co-operation, for example between journals and institutions and between editors and their publishers could reap considerable benefits.

The present situation calls for immediate redressal of the problem before it gets too late. All the stakeholders need to initiate dialogue to regulate knowledge creation, production and dissemination. Academic publishing needs proper screening and pruning. Weak publishing hurts the mind and souls of the researchers since; poor moral and ethical practices betray the trust of the research institutes, research students, research funders, academic societies and publishers. Raising research standards would mean promoting, strengthening, and maintaining ethical trends in the academia.

CONCLUSION

Quality publication is directly proportional to the research and teaching environment of an institute. HEC has to take the initiative to formulate and introduce a policy that measures the productivity of faculty members and scholars at regional and academic level to ensure transparency being applied when nominated for awards or selected for promotion. In cooperation with HEC-PCST, universities and institutes need to educate the faculty and the students about research integrity, research ethics to instill professional skills in them and also form a policy with a vision weaving the strands of teaching, learning and publishing. All the academic actors should work

jointly to bring uniformity in the policies relating publication, promotion and quality. We, as an academic community, have the responsibility to address the issues of buddy authorships, flawed articles, data fabrication and promotion on the basis of the number of research articles, and not the quality of the research paper and the reputation of the journal. Such compromises bring down the name of the respective departments and university and affect the quality of research produced when working under the supervision of those who rely on short-cuts and waste the academic capital of the university, students and the country. In order to popularize research culture in the academia, it is important to break hegemony of those who treat research as a commodity to earn award or promotion and eventually construct "an academic elite" with no attention paid to bringing "a balance between intellectual ethos and careerism" (Mills, 2010).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Certain steps can be taken to ensure transparency for career researchers:

- To advice or train editors, Peer Reviewers, and Editorial board on publication ethics. Peer Reviewers should be certified professionals who are wise enough to distinguish between original and fake research.
- Regulatory body, like HEC, academic institutes, journal editors, research societies need to agree on sound policies to promote strong ethical standards at national and international level. They (HEC and PCST) should publish the list of predatory journals, so that, the researchers avoid sending their articles to them.
- Academic institutes and research institutes should develop a vision that strictly adheres to international standard and guidelines in research, make efforts to establish strong editorial process that screens the manuscript thoroughly and fairly to establish tradition based on genuine trust and values of the research community.
- HEC along with PCST needs to establish a data wing that solely deals with publication ethics, appeals and publishes a newsletter on promoting high research standards in research institutes. Universities (under the umbrella of HEC) and PCST should stop awarding honors and promotion on the basis of number of papers produced. The culture of 'quantity' can be replaced with 'quality'. The research papers, which are original and of quality, can be awarded to strengthen honesty in teachers and researchers.
- Finally, there needs to be a proper division of hours for teaching and research prescribed overall in Pakistani universities. Faculty cadres, like Lecturers, Assistant Professors, Associate Professors and Full Professors, should clearly

know the hours they need to put in the areas of teaching, administering and supervision of students. It is appropriate here to mention another academic, Alis (2010) who points towards the serious issue of settling academic territories and knowledge standards for the institutes.

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