**The HEC must stop discrimination against international journals of social sciences**

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The Higher Education Commission ([HEC](https://dailytimes.com.pk/385874/higher-education-commission-rules-and-universities-on-charity/)) of Pakistan was established to promote higher education, research & development (R&D) and, above all, projection of Pakistan in (extra) regional academia in a manner that serves our national interest. However, it seems these objectives are not fully achieved after about two decades due to organizational incompetence, disciplinary biases, ad hocism and short-sightedness of (education) policy makers

Organizationally, the HEC has suffered from in-fighting over distribution of top slots, perks and privileges. Owing to internal power-tussle, the organization has failed to develop institutional ethos and values- which universally are considered conducive for organizational growth and efficacy. Moreover, the organization has, in the past sixteen years, fumbled at implementation of its policies regrading, for example, R&D in public and private sector university and degree awarding institutions. As a consequence, we saw many cases of illegal campuses, that minted money for years from poor families. The author is also aware of ‘fake’ HEC recognized “national” journals which published crap in the name of scientific research and national development. Such journals developed an art of charging heavy fee for publication of fourth-rate so-called research in especially social sciences and humanities. The tragedy is that people who published multiple articles in such and similar journals were promoted to higher positions within the educational establishment and, with time, they have developed stakes within the system to the extent that scholars with publications in internationally recognized journals are not let in.

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The HEC’s existing structure of national journals is classified as W (high), X (medium) and Y (low) category where the W category is believed to be very impactful academically and socially. Ironically, since the adoption of this scheme, none of the national journals from the social sciences could qualify as W category while X/Y etc., could not, overall, establish principles of objective scrutiny, rigorous peer-review, transparency, academic and social impact. Consequently, our national social sciences journals have not led to any meaningful debate on the most pressing issues at home, let alone engaging with (extra) regional challenges such as climate crisis. Moreover, owing to below average research produced by these journals, Pakistan, as a state, lost the strategic space to other nations particularly India when it comes to foreign policy debate on, for instance, Kashmir and/or Afghanistan. Comparatively, high-quality contents produced by a few Pakistani social scientists in internationally recognized social sciences journals have projected Pakistan globally. It is pitying their research has been rendered unacceptable by the HEC since 2012 on account of institutional incompetence and disciplinary bias. How cruel and criminal that the HEC only accepts research published in the Journal Citation Report (JCR), hosted by Clarivate Analytics- formerly hosted by the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI), Thomson Reuters. The said JCR, on average, consists of highly impact factor journals, i.e. Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), and it is quite a challenge even for an American social scientist to publish in the JCR list.

Interestingly, none of our national journals from the social sciences and huminites have any match whatsoever with even journals categorized as Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) maintained by Clarivate Analytics, which is commonly known as the Web of Science Group. The ESCI as a category has achieved universal recognition on account of rigorous peer-review, organizational transparency and objective knowledge production. However, as per the HEC policy, lots of Pakistani scholars and students, who happened to have published in the ESCI journals, are discredited and discriminated against institutionally for their research articles are not recognized by the former. The irony is most of HEC’s funded PhD scholars have published in the ESCI and/or Scopus but their original scientific work is not considered as ‘research’ and instead the plethora of ‘fake’ research piled up by local journals hosted by weird websites are privileged institutionally and financially. I personally know some very well-trained and widely published young social scientists who, after being discouraged and saddened by the HEC-oriented educational and research policy, left Pakistan for good. What a loss of brain that was invested in none else by the HEC itself.

To add insult to injury, the HEC, in one of its latest notifications, has established certain procedures to bring national (social sciences) journals at par with international standards. Interestingly, the Commission has stipulated that, from July 2020 onwards, national journals would have to be indexed in the Web of Science and Scopus. Though it is still not clear whether the HEC meant JCR or Master Journal List. Regardless, such a policy emphasis has, on the one hand, reflected the Commission’s inability to ensure quality enhancement of national journals in the past and, on the other, generated more uncertainty on the prospects of getting indexed in highly recognized global indices. In other words, how come a poorly reviewed national journal of social sciences be able to be indexed in the Web of Science where we could not have a single W category journal in social sciences in the past.

In view of the foregoing, the HEC is advised to ponder over the following suggestions in order to right the wrong. One, to put a permanent end to discrimination of International Journals of Social Sciences, the Commission must adopt the following three categories: one, SSCI journals (based on, but not limited to, Web of Science); two, ESCI (ibid ) and non-ESCI list that consists of indices and publishers based, for example, in Singapore , i.e. World Scientific, and/or China since the number of Pakistani scholars and students who are publishing in Chinese journals is increasing. However, in this respect, the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) can be adopted. Our national journals must be pushed to get indexed accordingly. Such a policy, if implemented in letter and spirit, would put an end to proliferation of third-rate local journals with their poor content. It would also provide equal opportunities to researchers from across the disciplines. Lastly, articles published in impact factor journals (SSCI/SCI) be counted accordingly while making appointments/promotions. It is hoped that the HEC chairman, who incidentally has a social sciences background, not only feels the sentiments but also addresses the problem once and for all.

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