RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Workshop Report

October 31, 2017

Contents

Introduction

Executing academic research in the higher education system of the country is one of the basic, serious and important needs of the system which aims to find solutions for all queries, necessities, and shortcomings of human resources and natural resources of the state and the nation; and needs to be strategically institutionalized. In other words, academic research needs to be converted from its current sporadic and individual status to a more systematic, purposeful and sustainable position.

To implement research projects and invest in training research cadre, it is necessary to fulfill the needs of each research project which includes equipping laboratories with needed equipment, chemicals and so forth, or simply, the needs of lab and training for each department and discipline should be fulfilled and there should be a capacity building process for those faculty members who are assumed to need such capacity building trainings. Afterwards, universities can move towards complexity and depth of knowledge, then we can reach to the level of neighboring countries in terms of research achievements as our primary goal. Our next goal can be to get a better position in the world.

Objectives and attendees

The workshop was conducted for all researchers who are funded by Higher Education Development Program (HEDP) in order to know the status of their research projects, hear their suggestions and recommendations and to help them find more reliable journals to publish their reports. The other objective of the workshop was to know about the challenges and opportunities of research in higher education. The workshop was held in Ministry of Higher Education's conference room.

Opening remarks

The opening remarks of the workshop were made by HE Abdul Tawab Balakarzai, the Deputy Minister for academic affairs of the ministry of higher education. The Deputy Minister thanked the researchers for the efforts they have made towards making higher education of Afghanistan more reliable in terms of academic research. He also urged that ministry of higher education is struggling to establish a research department in the ministry next year where the researchers of HEDP projects would be the founders of this department conditional that there is no burden at the ministry of finance for budgetary issues of this department. He also emphasized that MoHE will

establish research centers at universities in coming years and MoHE will try to find more financial resources to support research in higher education institutions.

Following him, Mr. Noor Ahmad Darwish welcomed the attendees and explained the research procedures of HEDP. He admired the researchers for doing research projects with HEDP and highlighted the issues that researchers have ignored in some cases. One of his remarks were on academic journals and emphasized that research papers should be published in reliable journals. This will embark a new page of development in higher education sector of Afghanistan. He answered to the questions of the researchers where there were monetary issues of the research contracts.

Afterwards, Mr. Zubair Sediqi, the director of academic development programs of MoHE talked about the new improvements in research in higher education system. He is also a member of research board of MoHE. He explained how the research proposals are received and how they are competitively selected for funding and sent to HEDP for further processes. Mr. Zubair Sediqi also addressed the closing remarks of the workshop at the end of the same day.

Publishing in academic journals

Ms. Sudaba Parnian Ahmadi presented a presentation on how to publish in academic journals, what characteristics should be considered by the researchers before publishing in a journal. She explained the fake, predatory and low credible journals to the attendees of the workshop. There were questions about academic journals and she answered the questions raised in that regard. A copy of this presentation is available in Annex II of this report. She also talked about what points not to be ignored before publishing in journals and then she also shared some useful links where the researchers can find predatory and fake journals and also sites where they can find open access journals and the ISSN.

Presentations by researchers

In this workshop a time was scheduled for some of the researchers to share their progress and tell the other participants how they did the research, which methodologies they used and how they reached the research result. This was a great experience for all researchers to get together and know about the research projects awarded so far. They also recommended that an opportunity should be provided to them so that they can present their research projects to a larger number of audience who are directly involved in the research fields of the researchers.

Comments and recommendations

In order to learn how to research correctly, first of all, we need to train faculty members about the research methodology and statistics, so that those faculty members who have not been trained in such courses during their studies can learn the fundamentals of research. These faculty members can then teach their students how to research. For this to be done, a comprehensive a long-term planning is essential.

No research is important unless they are published. Therefore, each research paper should be published, utilized and judged. For this, an academic journal or some academic journals that can be to standards of the rest of the world should be established in the higher education system of the country. Till the establishment and initiating such an academic journals in Afghanistan, it is better to specify journals which are both acceptable for the entities that support research projects in Afghanistan and easy for the researchers who publish their papers in such journals.

The budget for publishing in an international journal should be paid by the donor of the research project and for the projects funded in the future, this should be one of the necessities of the research proposal.

If as a part of research projects with the current procedures, Master Programs also be able to execute research projects and benefit from such fund will have a great contribution towards institutionalization of research in higher education entities of the country.

As a suggestion based on facts said before, it is also important that publishing the research papers should not be part of the contract and a condition for funding.

Here are some more comments from participants of the workshop on research in the higher education system:

- Research papers to be shared with the researchers,
- One or more than one journal to be published in public universities to the international or regional standards which can be acceptable for other researchers and are reliable enough to be cited by others,
- There are many opportunities to do research in Afghanistan, but most of the faculty members are not familiar with research concepts, therefore, is it needed to elevate the capacity of the faculty members to do the research.
- Ministry of Higher Education should provide some financial sources for researchers.

- A database should be developed at the MoHE where researchers can find which topics have already been researched to prevent the repetition of the same work,
- Research papers which are published in English should have a translation version as well, it can be in any of the local languages because most of the beneficiaries of the research projects are from Afghanistan,
- Specific number of papers should be introduced to the researchers so that they can publish their papers,
- Establishing a quality and standard journal in higher education sector of Afghanistan is necessary:
    - Help faculty members of public universities in finding a suitable standard journal,
    - Help Afghans use the outcomes of the research papers,
    - Invest in Afghanistan for elevation of knowledge and science,
    - Improving the standards of Afghan universities and higher education institutes,
- Organizing conferences for bringing research ideas, which is quite encouraging,
- Criteria for selecting accredited journals should be specified and a guideline should be shared with the researchers,
- This workshop was needed to be conducted at the beginning of each project award, still, it is a good start,
- MoHE/HEDP should make maximum use of lecturers who are will to contribute in research activities. There are people who will work voluntarily,
- Organize capacity building programs for the lecturers whose proposals are accepted,
- Launch national scientific journals,
- For publication in regional journals, enough money should be granted, while for accredited an extra mount should be paid, and MoHE should provide the list of acceptable journals,
- MoHE should help researchers in data collection process, there are government and nongovernment organization who do not share the needed data with the researchers, MoHE can help researchers in such cases,
- One of the main challenges is the lack of data equipment and security in most parts of Afghanistan which is very important for data collection and field surveys,
- It was a good step the HEDP held a group meeting, everyone discussed the issues. We hope this process will continue. It was very helpful. It is recommended that the payments to be awarded in advance so that the faculty members can do the research on time.

- The payments should be made earlier so that the researchers can do their research projects on time and in a proper manner,
- MoHE/HEDP should provide more research grants for the researchers, the current 30 research project is not enough,
- More research projects should be conducted on water management, mines, and agriculture.

Wrap up

Research is one of the basic tasks of the faculty members and needs to be enhanced and supported. Researchers who attended the workshop were all happy with the event, and of course, they have recommended that such workshops should be arranged at the beginning of the research work when the projects are awarded.

Furthermore, researchers insisted to have more research projects each year and MoHE should gain the support of donor community to improve and promote research culture in academic entities of the country. Research centers should be established, laboratories to be equipped and capacity building programs to be held for the faculty members.

Everyone in the workshop, including officials from Ministry of Higher Education appreciated HEDP for the opportunity they have provided for the researchers across the country.

Annexes

Annex I: Workshop Agenda

Research in Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities
Tuesday, October 31, 2017, Ministry of Higher Education, Kabul

Time	Activity	
8.30 am - 9.00 am	**Registration**	30 min
9.00 am - 9.05 am	**Recitation of Holy Quran**	5 mins
9.05 am - 9.10 am	**National Anthem**	5 min
9.10 am - 9.20 am	**Opening Remarks** **HE Deputy Minister Balakarzai**	10 min
9:20 am – 9:30 am	**Welcome speech** **Noor Ahmad Darwish**	10 min
9:30 am – 09:40 am	**Research in Higher Education** **Khwaja Zubair Sediqi**	10 min
09.40 am – 09.50 am	**Publishing in Academic Journals** **Sudaba Parnian Ahmadi**	10 min
09:50 am – 10:00 am	**Questions and Answers Session** **Sudaba Parnian Ahmadi**	10 min
10.00 am - 10.20 am	**Tea Break**	20 min
10.30 am – 12:00 pm	**First Round of Presentations**	90 min
12.00 pm - 01.30 pm	**Lunch and Prayer Break**	90 min
01:30 pm – 02:50 pm	**Second Round of Presentations**	80 min
02:50 pm – 03:00 pm	**Wrap up** **Khwaja Zubair Sediqi**	10 min
03:00 pm- 04:00 pm	**Per-diems of Provincial Participants**	60 min

Publishing in Academic Journals

Presented by: Higher Education Development Program

Kabul Oct 31, 2017

Highlights

▶ Why to publish?

▶ Practical tips before you publish

▶ How to get your article published?

▶ Publishing Speed

▶ Predatory Publishers

▶ Important points to remember

Why to publish?

- A necessary step in the research process
- Necessary for graduation and career progression
- Adding to the society's knowledge

What to publish:

- New and original results or methods
- Reviews or summaries of particular subject
- Manuscripts that advance the knowledge and understanding in a certain scientific field

What NOT to publish:

- Reports of no scientific interest
- Out of date work
- **Duplications** of previously published work
- Incorrect/unacceptable conclusions

Questions to answer before you publish

Think about WHY you want to publish your work.

- Is it **new and interesting**?
- Is it a current **hot topic**?
- Have you **provided solutions** to some difficult problems?
- Are you **ready** to publish at this point?

If all answers are "yes", then start preparations for your manuscript

Your Paper's Audience

- Identify the audience
- Verify their interest in the topic
  - "DNA sequence matching processor using FPGA and JAVA interface." in medical science and software engineering.
- Determine the range of interest - local vs international?
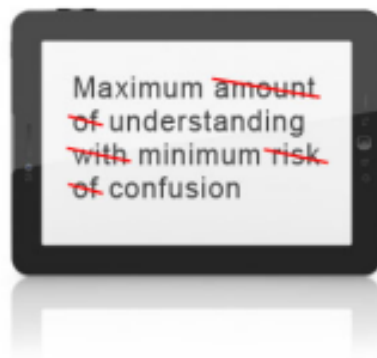 - "A bioequivalence study of Paracetamol tablets marketed in Northern Afghanistan"

What makes a good manuscript?

- Contains a clear, useful, and exciting scientific message.

- Flows in a logical manner that the reader can follow.

- Is formatted to best showcase the material.

- Is written in a style that transmits the message clearly.

A Word about Your Words

Journal space is precious. Be concise.

If clarity can be achieved in *n* words, never use *n+1*.

Maximum ~~amount~~ ~~of~~ understanding ~~with~~ minimum ~~risk~~ ~~of~~ confusion
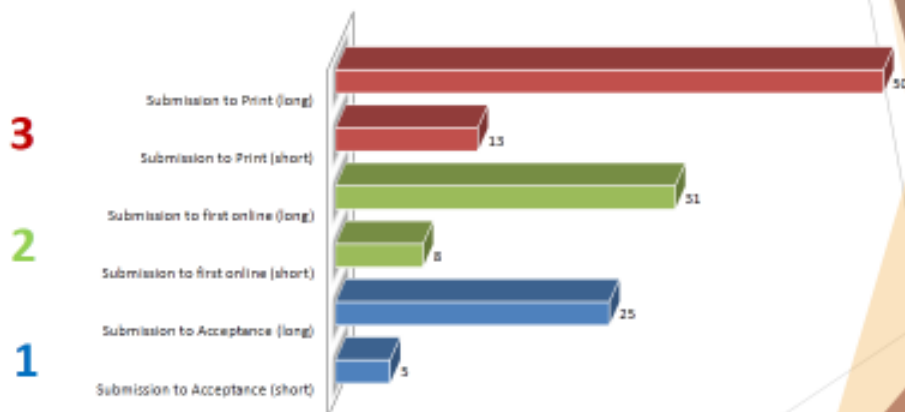
Select the best journal for submission

► Look at your reference list

► **Review** recent publications in **each candidate journal**.

► Decide on **one** journal. DO NOT submit to multiple journals.

► Ask yourself the following questions:
  ► Is the journal peer-reviewed?
  ► Who is this journal's audience?
  ► What is the average time to print?
  ► What is the journal's Impact Factor?
  [*Impact Factor* is the average annual number of citations per article published]

Publishing speed

Time to publish is important.

Long and short publishing times (weeks)

3

Submission to Print (long)	50
Submission to Print (short)	13

2

Submission to first online (long)	51
Submission to first online (short)	8

1

Submission to Acceptance (long)	25
Submission to Acceptance (short)	5

Many journals have now introduced a "Fast Rejection" process by the journal Editor

Predatory journals

▶ Predatory journals have the following characteristics:

  ▶ The journal has no address or contact information other than an email address listed;

  ▶ The email address is not official, it is simply a Gmail/Yahoo/etc. account;

  ▶ There are articles listed but no evidence of an editorial board to review those articles;

  ▶ There is no mention of a peer review process or basic submission requirements;

  ▶ The journal is not associated with any University, Professional Association or an institution; etc.

Before submission, check the http://beallslist.weebly.com/ to find out if the journals is among the Potential, possible, or probable predatory scholarly open-access publishers.

You can also check the Journals' ISSN through www.issn.org or if it carries the logo of ISI check www.isindexing.com

For open access journals, make sure to check if they are listed under www.doaj.org

Important to remember

▶ Preparation is important but do not spend too much time on your preparations

▶ Submit to the right journal (scope and prestige)

▶ Submit to one journal only

▶ Check the English

▶ Pay attention to structure

▶ Pay attention to journal requirements

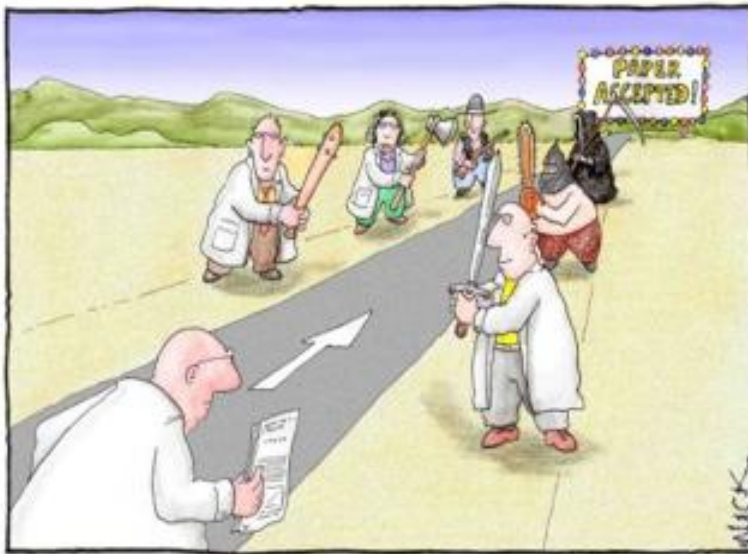## Important to remember

A research study is meaningful only if...
▶it is clearly described, so
▶someone else can use it in his/her studies
▶it arouses other scientists' interest and
▶allows others to reproduce the results.

By submitting a manuscript you are basically trying to sell your work to your community...

The review and editorial process

Most scientists regarded the new streamlined peer-review process as 'quite an improvement.'

Annex III: Pictures from the event

HE Engineer Abdul Tawab Balakarzai Deputy Minister for Academic Affairs and Mr. Khwaja Zuabair Sediqi Director of Academic Programs Development Programs attended the workshop

His Excellency Deputy Minister for Academic Affairs Abdul Tawab Balakarzai addressing the audience

Mr. Noor Ahmad Darwish Addressing the participants

Ms. Sudaba Parnian Ahmadi explaining how to publish in academic journals