Ethics of Scholarly Publishing an NRF Panellist's Perspective

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Background – the Rating System Panels

focus on **3 Panels**

- ADGSS   Anthropology, Developmental, Geography, Social Sciences
- EDU   Education
- EMAA   Economics Management Administration Accounting

3 Voices

A panel comprises:
     Specialist Committee   Assessor   Chairperson

Members of the panel assess
6 reviewers' reports/application
score and interpret rating of each

A panellist's prospective:
Tackling PJs, possible PJs and publishers, non-accredited journals

- **Compiled a list of PJs, possible PJs and predatory publishers**, based on the "old"

  Beall's list, internet searches, common knowledge & collective wisdom

- **Compiled a list of accreditation status** of journals used by applicants in the relevant disciplines (ADGSS, EDU and EMAA)

- **Compiled a set of guidelines for usability of reviewer reports**

  Note: reviewer template asks reviewers if portfolio included PJs

- **Reviewer reports that**:
  - **Do not identify the use of PJs**
  - **Stated categorically PJs not used**
  - **Failed to discuss a preponderance of PJs/lower-tier unaccredited journals/patterns of overuse of lower quality outputs in an applicant's portfolio.**

  Were scored 2/3 or 3

Relevance to the rating process and a researcher's rating

- Assessing one of the crucial criteria for NRF rating:

  quality of research as measured by outputs in credible journals

- To award a rating need 4-6 good reviewer reports

  scored 1, 1/2 or 2

- Failure to address the quality of journals used:

  reviewer report score of 2/3 (not used to sway a decision)
  or score of 3   (not used)

- More reports requested

Challenges encountered in implementation

- Fluidity in what constitutes a PJ, possible PJ, accredited/unaccredited journal

- Non-consensus among stakeholders (NRF, DHET, institutions, panellists, researchers)

- Anxiety among stakeholders of a "witch hunt"

- What percentage of these categories of outputs is acceptable within a portfolio?

- Applicants "hiding" such publications (on the advice of their institutions/research offices?). The panels/NRF have viewed this as **unethical**

Challenges encountered (cont)

- Reviewers not discussing use of PJ/lower impact unaccredited journals and delivering unrealistically positive report emphasising quality

- Disgard reviewer reports (given in good faith – **unethical**?)

- Long turn-around time in ratings process as more reviewer reports are solicited

- Lengthy correspondence between applicant/the institution, defending their portfolio, and the NRF

- Increase in applications to the Appeals committee

Accredited and non-accredited journals used by applicants in EMAA

Journal name	DHET	ISI	Scopus
Acta commercii	x		
Actual Problems of Economics			X
African Journal of Business Management			
African Journal of Agricultural Research			
American Journal of Applied Sciences			X
ARPN Journal of Science and Technology			
Asia Pacific Journal of Research			
British Journal of Economics, Management and Trade			
Business Review, Cambridge			
Communicare	x		
Corporate ownership and control			
Ghana Journal of Development Studies			
Indilinga	x		
Industry and Higher Education			
Innovative Marketing			
International Business & Economics Research Journal			
International Journal of Arts and Sciences			
International Journal of Communication			X
International Journal of Education			
International Journal of Educational Administration			
International Journal of Educational Sciences			
International Journal of Innovative Management		X	
International Journal of Social Sciences			
Journal of Accounting and Management			
Journal of Applied Business Research			X

Journal Name	DHET	ISI	Scopus
Journal of Communication (WILEY)		x	
Journal of Contemporary Management			
Journal of Economics			
Journal of Economics and Behavioral Studies			
Journal of Economic Issues (Routledge)		x	X
Journal of Governance and Regulation			
Journal of Human Ecology			
Journal for New Generation Sciences	x		
Journal of Physical Education Research			
Journal of Physical Education and Sport Management			
Journal of Psychology (JP)			
Journal of Psychology (Routledge)		x	
Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology			
Journal of Social Sciences			
Journal of Studies in Ethno Medicine			
Journal of Transport and Supply Chain Management	x		
Management Dynamics	x		
Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences			
Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences			
Problems and Perspectives in Management			X
Risk Governance and Control: Financial Markets and Institutions			X
Studies of Tribes and Tribal			
The Anthropologist			
Tourism analysis			X
Tydskrif vir Geestewetenskap	x		

Accredited and non-accredited journals used by applicants in EDU in 2017 at time of panel meeting

Journal title	IBSS	DHET	ISI	Scopus
African Journal of Research in Mathematics, Science and Technology Education		x		
Africa Education Review		x		x
African Education Review				
African Journal of Pedagogy and Curriculum				
Alternation: Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the Arts and Humanities (UKZN pub)		x		
Australian Journal of Early Childhood (sounds so good, but I can't locate it)				
Behavioural Studies				
Commonwealth, Youth and Development				
Convergence: Journal of the International Council for Adult Education				
Creative Education				
Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning				
Early Childhood Education Journal				x
Educational Management Administration and Leadership				x
Educational Research for Social Change	x			
Educational Technology & Society				x
Environmental Economics	x			
European Journal of Special Needs Education			x	x
Global Research Journal on Mathematics and Science Education				
Indian Journal of Teacher Education				
International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences				
International Journal of Computational Engineering Research				
International Journal of Educational Sciences				
International Journal of Educational Research				
International Journal of Inclusive Education			x	
International Journal of Modern Engineering Research				
International Journal of Research and Reviews in Applied Sciences				
International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning			x	
Journal for New Generation Sciences		x		
Journal of Communication				x
Journal of Economics and Economic Education Research				x
Journal of Education (UKZN pub)		x		
Journal of Engineering and Applied Sciences				x
Journal of Family Ecology and Consumer Sciences				
Journal of Human Ecology				
Journal of Intergenerational Relationships				x
Journal of International Cooperation in Education				
Journal of International Education Research				
Journal of Social Sciences				
Journal of Student Affairs in Africa				
Journal of Learning for Development				
Kasvatus (The Finnish Journal of Education)				
Knowledge Cultures				
Loyola Journal of Social Sciences		x		
Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences				
Mevlana International Journal of Education				
Open Journal of Philosophy				
Open Praxis				
Per Linguam				
Perspectives in Education			x	x
Postcolonial Directions in Education				
Procedia: Social and Behavioural Sciences				
Procedia Technology				
Progressio		x		
Science and IKS				
South African Journal of Higher Education (UNISA)		x		
Studies of Tribes and Tribals				
Teaching Science across the Curriculum				
The International Journal on Diversity in Organizations, Communities and Nations				
Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa				
US-China Education Review				
Western Journal of Black Studies				
World Studies in Education				
Wulfenia Journal (multi-disciplinary)				
Wulfenia [a BOTANICAL JOURNAL THAT HAS BEEN HIJACKED]				x

Case 1: The case of the moving target
PJ or not a PJ?

- Panel members consult their list of PJs/possible PJs/accredited journals

- DHET list of PJs/possible PJs/dubious publication outlets changes

- Reviewers and SC members express disparate opinions on standing of some journals

Accreditation status of Journals used by Case 1

CasE 1 Journals Applicant 1	DHET	IBSS	ISI	Nor	Scopus
Int Journal of Bus &Mment		X			
Corvinus J of Sociol & Soc Policy (2)					
Int J of Soc Sci & Humanity Studies		X			
J of Pub Admin	X				
J of Hum Ecology (4) ***On/Off/On DHET list					
Med Journal of Social Sciences (3) Known PJ ***					
Journal of Social Sciences (5) ***On/off/on DHET list					
Studies of Tribes and Tribals (2) ***On/Off/On DHET list					
Studies on Ethno-Medicine (3) ***On/Off/On DHET list					

Journals used	DHET	IBSS	ISI	Nor	Scopus
Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology		X			
Anthropological Notebooks		X			
Journal of Soc Anthro & Sociol ***On/Off/On DHET list					
J of Sociol and Soc Anthro (?)					
Change and Adaptation in Socio-ecological Systems					
The Anthropologist					
Int J of Dev &and Mment Review					
Lesotho Social Science Review					
LWATI: J of Contemp Res					
Acta Criminologica: Southern African J of Criminology	X				
Boleswa J of Theol, Religion&Phil Philosophy					

Case 1: Further discussion

Publication pattern

- **PJ**: Med J of Social Sci (3)
- **On/Off/On DHET accredited journals**:

  J of Human Ecology (4 publications)

  Studies of Tribes and Tribalism (2)

  Studies in Ethnomedicine (3)

  J of Soc Sci (5)

- Applicant has 35 journal articles in portfolio

  17/35 are PJs/possible PJs

  49% of portfolio PJs/possible PJs/unaccredited Js

Scores and ratings: summary Case 1

Reviewer	SComm	Assessor	Chair	Comments from Chairperson
1*	1/2 C	1/2 C-	2 C-	Doesn't mention PJs but states majority of Journals not the most reputable (PJ proxy by our rules)
2*	1/2 C+	2/3 C+	2 C-	Publishes in KRE journals (proxy)
3*	1/2 C	2/3 C+	3	Over the top report
4	2 C	2 C-	2 C-	Publishes in KRE journals (PJ proxy)
5	3	3	3	Brief
6*	3	2/3 C-/RU	2/3 C-/RU	Critical of best 5. Hints of Lack of focus. Weak report (hence 2/3)
7	2/3 C	2/3 C	2/3 C	**All journals are credible and on DHET list. All high impact**
8	1/2 RU	2 RU	1/2 RU	Lack of focus and impact. Bulk of outputs in low impact journals. Misrepresents keynote/plenaries
Consensus	C2*	RU	RU	

*later changed to RU

Usable reports

Outcome: discussion between NRF and Institution

CASE 2: The case of the missing articles

- Applicant listed **72** articles in the peer-reviewed category
- Narrative sections stated:

   My total research outputs have increased steadily from about 21 publications as at 2008, to more than **140** *publications in 2015.*

   During the past 8 years, I have conducted extensive research in sub- Saharan Africa (SSA), which has produced more than **115** *publications. These papers have been published in more than 55 international journals.*

Analysis: Where are the Missing articles?

	ISSN/ISBN	# articles/journal in or out of application
• J of Social Sciences	NO	1 included
• Actual Problems of Economics	NO	2/4 excluded
• Banks and Bank Systems	NO	4/4 excluded
• Banks and Bank Systems	YES	1 included
• Corp Ownership & Cont	NO	7/7 excluded
• IBER	NO	8/8 excluded
• J Governance & Regulation	NO	3/3 excluded
• J of Applied Business	NO	3/7 excluded
• Probs & Perspects in M'ment	NO	4/4 excluded
• Risks Gov & Control	NO	4/4 excluded
• Risks Gov & Control	YES	1 included

Red font – formerly on Beall's list

Cont: The unethical case of the missing articles

- Applicant concealed 42 outputs in PJs/non-accredited journals/no ISBN/ISSN numbers
- States an output of 114 peer-reviewed articles (confirmed in NRF-generated Research Outputs table).
- The number of articles listed in the appropriate section of his rating application (visible to reviewers) is 72
- Consequence:

  reviewers commended high productivity

  do not see hidden predatory and other lower ranked journals
- In the full research portfolio, overuse of such journals (37%) would negatively affect overall rating. Hiding them would enhance it
- Applicant acted on advice in consultation with the Institution
- **The case threatens the integrity of the NRF rating system, it impacts on time and costs and it is unfair to candidates who work within the system to achieve the desired outcome**
  - **Outcome: discussions between NRF and Institution**

Case 3: Hidden article + supervised students using PJs

- PJs in application:

- *Mediterranean Journal of Social Science (2)*

- *Journal of Governance and Regulation (1)*

- *3/19 outputs (*16%) acceptable percentage?

- .Further analysis: co-authored paper with PhD student hidden:

  Corporate Ownership & Control a PJ 4/19 (21%)

  4 other listed non-co-authored best student outputs in PJs/possible PJs: *Corporate Ownership & Control* (1), *Journal of Governance and Regulation* (1) and *Mediterranean Journal of Social Science* (2)

Case 3: Hidden article + students using PJs

Reviewer	SC	A	C	Comments
1	1/2 C+	2/3 C+	2/3 C+	Reviewer & applicant at same institution. No mention of PJs. Very positive
2	2 C	2/3 C	2/3 (C+)	Brief report and no mention of PJs Visible on an international level
3	2 C+	2/3 C+	2/3 C	Brief and superficial. No mention of PJs
4	2/3 C	2/3 C	2/3 C	Reputable journals. No mention of PJs
		**	**	** no credible reports

26 reviewers approached

Outcome: discussions between NRF and Institution

Suggestions for the way forward

- Stakeholders (NRF,DHET, academia) compile:

1) a list of acceptable journals

2) a list of unaccredited journals

3) a list of journals that should be avoided (predatory/dubious)

   commence with short lists, continuously update

- Responsibility of the institution and researcher to be aware of the acceptability of journals and have access to the lists. Allow reviewers access to the lists

- Allow individual motivation for publishing in journals that are not (yet?) officially accredited on any database – or whose status has changed

Cont:

- Change the naming of research output categories on the application template:
  - *From*: Articles in refereed/peer reviewed journals
    To: Articles in refereed/peer reviewed accredited journals (with lists available on NRF website – advising applicants and reviewers).

  - Add a section in which applicants tick DHET, ISI, SCOPUS listed journals

  - *From*: Articles in non-refereed/non peer reviewed journals
    To: Articles in non-refereed/non-peer reviewed/non-accredited journals

Cont:

- Set up an IT system that flags any journals on the list of PJ/possibly PJ or non-accredited journals in an application. Convey this to applicant/institution/reviewer

- Notify the Specialist Committee who will decide on action to be taken (in consultation with RE manager and institution)

- Make it clear that listing outputs in the wrong category of outputs is **unethical**

    Journals not eligible for the peer-reviewed/accredited category can be listed in the non-peer-reviewed/non-accredited category

- Make it clear that "hiding" journals is **unethical**

Another Chairperson's comments

- **I think we should stop the majority of predatory issues before they reach the assessment stage.** We cannot seamlessly shift the responsibility onto reviewers and then if they do not meet our list of expectations **we cannot discard these reviewer reports**. If the NRF has a rule about predatory journals, the NRF should inform Institutions what they are allowed to list or not list and if these rules are not applied **send the applications back with the motivational relevant detail.**

- It can be **computerised** what is out and what is in. If it is argued that it cannot be done, why should a panel or a reviewer be able to do it?? You have had panels and assessors that took this responsibility very seriously but to expect that to be the norm amongst all panels, Chairs and assessors is a big ask.

- I think all publications with questionable reviewer policies (or not on the NRF list of acceptable) should be **listed under a separate heading in the application**. I am convinced that a number of these may still have fair or even substantial merit and a reviewer may just comment that some of these papers have made a solid contribution and could well have been published in better journals. It will take the sting out of the predatory journal issue and still allow the candidate to get some recognition for what has been published.

Prof H Huismans Chairperson

In Conclusion

- "More workshops in basic bibliometrics are needed to understand the publication and citation behaviour, the dangers of unethical and questionable practices in scientific authorship and especially of predatory publishing for all students and emerging scholars."

- **"Growth in output must go hand in hand with proper quality and ethical surveillance"**

Kelley Cobey