Comments on the Draft Journal Evaluation Report

Bahir Dar University
The need for standardizing

With increase in number and diversity of higher Education and research institutions, it is expected that new journal are expected to be launched to create a platform for an ever increasing number of young researchers, academicians and practitioners.

The practice of journal accreditation and the eventual outcomes are variable across institutions even within institutions. Formulation of a national journal accreditation system that will be practical across the country, it is therefore timely.

The initiative of the EAS is thus highly appreciated.
Institutional arrangements

• A clear distinction has to be made between Evaluating Institution and Accreditation Agency from the very beginning.

• The duties and responsibilities of the Evaluation Institution have to be listed out.
Institutional Arrangement

• The Ministry of Education is the most suitable entity to handle the responsibility of Journal accreditation. It also has a significant amount of transparency and legal mandate to effectively conduct this task.

• The Ministry of Education/HERQA can take the leading role of Journal Accreditation.

• However, whether the accrediting institution is MoST or MoE, unlike in the case of South Africa, we do not recommend that either of them be directly involved in journal evaluation activities per se as they have yet to develop the organizational structure and professional expertise to effectively shoulder this responsibility.

• EAS can take the responsibility for Evaluation.
4.2.3 Duties and Responsibilities of Accreditation Agency

- As already identified by the editors of the journals we surveyed, the main functions of the Accreditation Agency would be to:

- set journal evaluation criteria, and guidelines for peer review and journal ranking;

- Is it technically feasible for an entity to rank the Journals of governmental and non-governmental higher institutions and journals of different arrays of fields and subject matters?
4.3.3 Submission of Applications

Eligibility to apply

• To be eligible to apply for accreditation in Ethiopia, a journal must:
• have the aim of publishing original research articles (but not for commercial purposes);

What about, research letters/letter to the editor, book reviews, review articles, reviews, short communications, technical notes, case report, and discussion paper?

• accommodate research articles on Ethiopian issues.

• Does it exclude contributions from abroad?
• This will discourage internationalization of the journals
4.3.4 Evaluation Procedures and Processes

- b. Determine subject bands or disciplinary clusters
- The Accrediting Agency, in collaboration with the external Evaluating institution, shall determine the banding of specific subject areas on the basis of the focus areas of the articles published in each issue of the last three volumes to be evaluated. This banding of subject areas will help to determine the range of expertise required to form review panels for the evaluations.
- Who is this external Evaluating institution? A clear distinction has to be made between Evaluating and Accreditation Agency. The duties and responsibilities have to be elaborated.

D). Establish Panels of Experts as per profile of peer reviewers

- There should be some mechanism to ensure the independence, neutrality and impartiality of the panel of experts who are going to be assigned as a peer reviewers for the journal ranking and accreditation.
4.2.3. Duties and Responsibilities of Accreditation Agency

- The last task i.e. undertake or commission research to further understand systemic and structural impediments to the flourishing of scholarship, journal publishing and graduate programs’ productivity, and act or mobilize other relevant authorities to take measures to create a more conducive research and publishing environment.

- This task seems ambitious.
Major criteria to evaluate scholarly journals

- Apply the evaluation and journal ranking criteria
- Criteria and points to be assigned should more objective? For instance, scholarly quality of research articles, what type of articles will be given 0-25 points?

- Editor’s and Editorial Board members’ scholarly profile
  - *Indicators*: length of editorial experience, no. of research articles in other reputable national and international journals, field of expertise’s relevance to journal

- These criteria seem unrealistic because staff turnover in many institutes is high. Even then, these criteria let an editor and editorial Board members stay for a long period and open chance for potential, young editors. This problem is critical to newly launched journal.
- It excludes those who can be good professional editors but had no prior opportunity to work as editors.
• Any journal that doesn’t score at least 50% of the points allotted to each one of criterion (i), (iii), (v) and (vi) in the combined evaluation shall not qualify for accreditation, no matter what its total aggregate score under the other criteria.

• Any journal that scores a total of at least 50 points (out of 100), including 50% of the total points allotted to each one of criterion (i), (iii), (v) and (vi) shall be accredited.

• Since most authors need to use their publications for promotion purposes, for new journals, it may not be possible to get quality manuscripts. So, the start up manuscripts may not be so strong in their methodological rigor.
• The accreditation of a journal depends not just on earning a total of 50 points out of 100 in the consolidated score, but also earning 50% of the points allotted particularly for the following criteria:
  i. Scholarly quality of research articles (25 pts):
  iii. Competency of reviewers and critical rigor of the review process (15 pts)
    v. Editor’s scholarly profile (10 pts)
  vi. Editorial Board members’ scholarly profile (10 pts)

A similar concern related to Editor’s and Editorial Board Members’ professional experience
General Remarks

- Most journals in Ethiopia are young and are spearheaded by relatively young and energetic scholars. Thus evaluating and ranking such journals using international standards and is going to be counterproductive and destructive.

- So, EAS or any accrediting entity should employ standards that fit to the Ethiopian circumstances and realities.

- The issue of defining the reputability of International journal is still unresolved in many Ethiopian higher Education Institutions.

- Can the EAS or the future accreditation institution develop a system to resolve this issue?
Thank you