

The politics of peer-review in the scientific research: A personal view!

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Are the scientific research publication policies as fair as it appears? Are the researchers properly accredited for their work? A recent debate on a forum of world's leading scientists and researchers, namely 'CCL'[www.ccl.net] has revealed some facts that should be brought in the attention of the whole scientific community. The debate started with a post on whether it is fair to disclose the identity of authors to the reviewers during peer review process. More than 30 persons have participated in this debate, ranging from young researchers to the editors of various scientific journals. The different peer policies were criticized on the basis of their merits as well as demerits. Here we point out some unrevealed facts that have been explored.



15 The double-blind peer review has been advocated by most of the young researchers on the basis of equality and unbiasedness, but at the same time criticized by many experienced scientists. They argue that such process does not make sense for an experienced reviewer as he/she can easily trace the name of authors by writing-style, research-area, self-citations etc. On the other hands, some editors also oppose this policy, considering it fearful for reviewers. The policy currently adopted by most of the journals, single-blind, in which reviewers are anonymous, but not authors has been advocated by many experienced scientists, including some editors as well. However, young researchers have suspected the bias it may put on the heads of reviewers during their review assignments. They argued that their manuscripts have been rejected due to lack of name of their mentors or renowned scientists. But when included with the mentors' names, their work was happily accepted for publication, without any change in the manuscripts. This may imply that there are some cracks in this policy. Even more frustrating was the fact that the most of the leading (high impact) journals return their manuscripts without review due to absence of any 'big' name in the authors' list.

Some people are found to be unsatisfied with above both policies and suggested zero-blind or double-open system. The argument given in this favor was that if authors and reviewers both have done their jobs honestly, there is no need to create anonymity.

40 Of course, no system or policy can be thought as perfect. There are some pros and cons of each system. However, the path should be chosen to minimize the conflicts as much as possible. The main toss is between single-blind and double-blind policies. It seems that single-blind is mainly advocated by established scientists, whereas, double-blind is emphasized by young-researchers. The established scientists want their scientific works to be recognized by their names and young researchers wish their works should be recognized on the basis of its scientific merits. Needless to say, it is the only way they can earn their names and identity. A recent survey has also indicated towards this point [1]. In this survey, 65% people have been found to favor the double-blind policy and only 25% being happy with the single-blind peer

review. Apparently, the double-blind peer review has not been seen much harmful. Furthermore, the arguments against this policy do not sound valid.

There is another aspect that needs to be taken into account. Youth power should be recognized as the most influential and active power in any country or field. Obviously, it is the power which is going to lead the world of the future. There are a number of efforts made by government to attract and promote the contribution of youngsters in the scientific research and development. Taking it from Indian context, there are many fellowship and research-associateship started by University Grants Commission (UGC), Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) from central government. At the same time, similar steps have been taken by state government and local institutions. Apart from this, a number of scientific awards viz. young scientist award (YSA) and research-grants, namely Starter grant from UGC etc. have been offered to young researchers for their research encouragement and establishment.

On the other hand, their works are not properly recognized, merely due to some politics. It is not a thing that happens with every good journal, but with most of the good journals, which minimizes the chance of a work to be published. It may still be a matter of debate what steps should be taken against such ignorance or suppression of the works with good scientific quality. Such irritating act does not only create frustrations among young researchers but also deviates them from scientific research. Conclusively, the peer review policies need to be revised and reconsidered for the welfare of the young researchers. It must be fair and transparent as well as free of politics.

Notes and References

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