

## Peer-reviewed, high-quality research publications from Indian academia

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The centres of higher learning and research, i.e. universities and institutions, have two mandated intellectual exercises to perform: teaching and research. Teachers regularly lecture on assigned and/or specialized courses, also work on researches in their areas of specialization. Teaching and research workload is computed in hours per week. The University Grants Commission has stipulated 40 h as the minimum number of work hours per week.

There are different views on scientific and academic research outputs. While majority opine that peer-reviewed and/or socially relevant publications by teachers and scientists are the measurable index of their performance, many view that all socially relevant and product-oriented studies do not necessarily result with publications. Ideally both views are correct. All eventually strengthen the structure of the universities and institutions of higher learning and thereby the society. Seers and priests are also considered socially important in view of their relevance and so are teachers and scientists to the society.

Based on estimated expenditure and relevance, the State or Central Government decides the level of support or funding to each discipline in the university. For example, a medical or technical institute is supported to a greater degree compared to others. Premier research institutions have more funds allocated for research. In the universities, science departments derive more funding than those of humanities and languages. Financial support available in various national and regional funding agencies for social sciences and languages is equally plentiful.

The government and society generally do not ask questions on societal relevance of publications generated by academia because in pure sciences, humanities and languages, publications emanate largely from our understanding of the subject and do not always appear to be of direct application to development. It is precisely for this reason that the government or funding agencies do not ask questions and distinguish basic

and applied components, but justifiably support such disciplines in the universities. For example, a teacher or scholar who conducts basic taxonomic research is also socially relevant because taxonomists contribute to the understanding of biodiversity and thereby the ecosystem. Likewise, a history teacher narrates the architectural grandeur of an ancient statue with inscriptions of another time-period. A language teacher is marvelled by age-old traditions of a village folk dance. With these inspired activities, teachers in any of the disciplines, viz. science, humanities and languages, automatically become socially relevant because they too pursue their researches with passion. Eventually, that is what the society expects from the academia, enhanced intellectual discourses, dissemination of good knowledge and dedicated service to human resource development and thereby improved quality of living.

Curiosity to collate and eagerness to disseminate knowledge drives a teacher to research. Some in the academic fraternity opine that research should be purely for the pursuit of knowledge and emphasis on publications is irrelevant. The concern is how will this research-generated knowledge percolate into the societal labyrinth? Peer-reviewed and published articles by the academic community are not only a testimony of good research done, but also a mode of dissemination of knowledge. That was the approach of the sages in ancient times, who lived frugally but shared their enlightened knowledge and wisdom with the society with enormous generosity. Their writings on palm leaves or copper plates are an invaluable source of information and wisdom today and such inscriptions are read and re-read numerous times.

Higher education and research, requires a huge infrastructure that has to be funded by the society or government, i.e. from tax-payers money. Many in the public do not know that teachers in the universities and scientists in the institutions are a well-paid sector in our country. This segment is therefore answerable to the society and indirectly to the taxpayer. What argument can we put

that the expenditure incurred at the university and the institutions is just? Should publications not be an important yardstick?

Some argue that measuring research contribution merely by the number of publications, instead of their quality, has led to the mushrooming of casual or spurious publications. Good research and pursuit of knowledge may take more time and it is the final output that has to be considered even if it results in few publications. Ideally, in order to showcase credibility, an institution should have a good number of high-quality publications over a timescale. If, on the contrary, there are low-quality publications or even less number of moderately good publications, it will operate against the system, especially in attracting good funding or even good students. A good and responsible university or institution will always reorient itself and generate high-quality publications. One cannot also ignore the quantity under an excuse that high-quality publications come only sparingly.

No matter how idealistic a teacher is, a certain amount of accountability is essential. With teaching workload specified in the universities, the alternate measure available in the higher education system to evaluate the performance of the teacher is the number of good publications. High-quality publications in high impact factor (IF) journals or publications with high citation indices are always appreciated. The problem is not the yardstick; it is with those who disregard this. The criterion of judging the credibility of a teacher merely by publications may not be the most ideal either. Yet, it is the best that is available. There are continued efforts to improve the measure. The most practised criteria in the last decade are IF and citation indices. We need to rely on these at least for the present. The public will always recognize good publications, those that have contributed to the progress of the society. Therefore, high-quality research publications will continue to remain a measurable index of performance and deliverables in the university system.

There are of course problems which come in the way of good research and publications in the institutions of higher learning. Timely release of funds, in various projects sponsored by different funding agencies, is important to realize the objectives set out. Otherwise, any delay would hamper the progress of the time-bound projects. Further, such delays would even demoralize the project staff. Mechanism and processes of release of funds need to be streamlined for timely release, especially in different ongoing projects.

Needless to say, there are administrative wrangles which come in the way of good research in India<sup>1-3</sup>. The reasons for lack of good publications from the researches carried out in India are discussed elsewhere<sup>4,5</sup>. In spite of the drawbacks mentioned above, papers published in high IF and peer-reviewed good research journals will always remain a barometer of valued performance of an academician/researcher.

1. Ramamurthy, M. V., *Curr. Sci.*, 2008, **95**, 930-831.

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3. Sarma, V. V., *Curr. Sci.*, 2008, **95**, 1512.

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