

Alumni Column

*Rethinking Academic Performance
Metrics:*

BEYOND THE PUBLICATION CRAZE

By: Dr. Ahlam Sundus



In the fast-paced world of academia, the metrics for success have become remarkably narrow. Universities worldwide have heavily relied on a primary benchmark to gauge their performance: the number of publications in indexed journals. It's a system that, on the surface, appears to encourage scholarly output but hides a deeper and more troubling truth – the ineffective implications of this fixation on publications as key performance indicators.

The current paradigm is clear: promotions, tenure, and even postgraduate defenses are all contingent on the prolific production of research articles. This relentless pursuit of quantity, however, raises an essential question: are we sacrificing quality, innovation, and genuine problem-solving at the altar of publication quotas? The answer, unfortunately, seems to be a resounding "yes." Year after year, thousands of students and university staff churn out research papers, but the impact of this deluge remains elusive. Instead of groundbreaking discoveries and cost-effective solutions, we are witnessing a publication race where the finish line is defined by volume, not substance.

One alarming consequence of this obsession with publications is the proliferation of predatory journals. These opportunistic platforms have sprung up to cater to the insatiable demand for publication credits. They exploit the desperation of researchers, charging exorbitant fees for publication, often without rigorous peer review. In this cutthroat world, some individuals resort to unscrupulous tactics, like inviting others to co-author papers solely to share the burden of Article Processing Charges (APC).

So, what can be done to break free from this publication frenzy and restore the essence of true academic pursuit? In the pursuit of redefining academic excellence, it is imperative to transcend the traditional constraints of assessing university performance solely through the volume of publications. A multidimensional approach, encompassing diverse performance indicators, promises a more comprehensive and reflective evaluation of an institution's contribution to society and the world at large.

One pivotal aspect lies in encouraging universities to prioritise community engagement and societal impact as central evaluative criteria. By measuring how research actively contributes to local communities, addresses societal challenges, and fosters environmental well-being, institutions can gauge their true impact on the world beyond scholarly circles. Moreover, the translation of academic research into practical applications plays a fundamental role in this recalibration of success metrics. Recognising and incentivising efforts that bridge the gap between academia and industry, turning research outcomes into tangible solutions for real-world problems, becomes an integral part of the assessment process.



Innovation, evidenced through patents and the ability to generate pioneering ideas, becomes another vital measure. Patents, as an indicator, not only signify the potential for economic and technological advancement but also highlight the impact and originality of research endeavors.

Interdisciplinary collaboration emerges as a cornerstone in problem-solving. Rewarding institutions that actively foster partnerships across diverse academic fields acknowledges the necessity of multidisciplinary approaches in addressing complex, real-world challenges. Universities must also excel in communicating their research findings to the public. Evaluating the effectiveness of science communication initiatives and their ability to make research accessible and understandable to a broader audience will further expand the reach and impact of academic pursuits.

Environmental sustainability, global impact, social responsibility, student and faculty well-being, and a focus on long-term research sustainability are all equally critical facets that institutions should embrace in their quest for excellence. This diversified array of performance indicators encourages universities to address real-world challenges, fostering innovation and making a tangible, meaningful impact on society, the environment, and the planet as a whole. It's a shift from a myopic focus on publication metrics to a more holistic and impactful vision of academic achievement.

In conclusion, the time has come for a paradigm shift in academia. We must move away from the myopic fixation on publications as the sole measure of success. Let us redefine our priorities, placing quality, innovation, and ethical research at the forefront. Only then can we ensure that our universities truly serve as beacons of knowledge, driving meaningful change in the world. It's time to break free from the shackles of the publication craze and embrace a more profound, impactful vision of academic excellence.

About the Author

Dr. Ahlam Sundus was a UiTM's postgraduate student for Masters in Clinical Pharmacy in 2013 to 2017. Currently, she is an assistant professor at International Islamic University (IIUM), Kuantan Campus, Malaysia. She successfully secured 100% scholarship from Taylor's University to pursue her PhD.