Strategic Approaches to High Impact Research Publication among Young Academic Staff

Melor Md Yunus[1], Harwati Hashim[2]*, Siti Mistima Maat[3] & Fetylyana Nor Pazilah[4]
{*harwati@ukm.edu.my}

[1,2,3,4]Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Abstract. At public universities in Malaysia, research and innovation are imperative in complementing Key Result Area (KRA) which is to produce research that are significant to economic and social development through ecosystem that can nurture intellect discovery, innovation, disseminate of knowledge and knowledge application. One of the key shifts toward research and innovation is by generating new knowledge as well as being referred among the academicians, industries, community and others. Consequently, academic staff at public universities are required to publish research at high impact journal such as indexed by Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) /SCOPUS. Nevertheless, at the public university in Selangor, much effort and consideration need to be taken in encouraging the academic staff to publish especially among the junior and those who are new in the service. Thus, the objectives of this study are to understand young academic staff' challenges in publishing journal paper and to obtain their opinion on steps to be taken in increasing publication. Qualitative research design was employed in this study. Focus group session was conducted with young academic staff of the public university in Selangor, Malaysia. The focus group information was used to identify strategic approaches that could be implemented. This paper discusses those strategic approaches and presents the implications at the administration level.

Keywords : Approaches, Publication, Academic

1. Introduction

Regularly, the major responsibilities of academic staff in a university are teaching (transmission of knowledge), research (advancement of knowledge) and community service (application of knowledge) [1]. However, at public universities in Malaysia, it should be acknowledged that within much of the academy, research is at the top of the pyramid, followed by teaching and then community service. Faculty members perceive research to be the outstanding component and is deemed to be as important as teaching and community service. Publication of journals in SSCI/SCOPUS has become a priority for universities and other research institutions [2]. Nevertheless, it is reported that there are certain structural barriers to engaging in lecturers' engagement in publication activities. At the public university in Selangor, research and innovation are imperative in complementing Key Result Area (KRA) which is to produce research that are significant to economic and social development through ecosystem that can nurture intellect discovery, innovation, disseminate of knowledge and knowledge application. One of the key shifts toward research and innovation is by generating new knowledge as well as being referred among the academicians, industries, community and others. Consequently, academic staff at public universities are

required to publish research at high impact journal such as indexed by SSCI/SCOPUS. Although there is clear evidence that administrators at many institutions together with academic staff realise the importance of publication within the university structure, there is still an unacceptably low level of SSCI/SCOPUS publication productivity especially among the junior and those who are new in the service. Thus, the objectives of this study are to understand young academic staff' challenges in publishing journal paper and to obtain their opinion on steps to be taken in increasing publication

Scholarly publications in higher institutions of higher learning have undergone rapid changes [3]. The globalisation of higher education and research institutions, university rankings and the emergence of electronic scholarly journals contribute to the changes of these institutions are facing today [4]. Scholarly publications in academic institution has become very significant in a way that even staff promotion is entirely based on it, as the popular saying of 'publish or perish', according to [5]. But even with the importance of scholarly publication in academic institutions, a lot of challenges are faced by academic staff to meet their targets. There are numerous factors that have been found to be associated with publication productivity. According to [6], related factors appear to be socio-demographic and career factors as well as self-knowledge, social knowledge, behaviours and environmental constructs. [7] investigated the factors related to research productivity of human resource education and workforce development in the postsecondary faculty, and as a result classified related factors into three categories: environmental factors, institutional factors and individual interest and ability factors.

In existing literature, several studies have examined the higher education stream for different reasons in different institutional settings. For instance, one group of scholars has mainly emphasized the performance of higher educational institutions, private higher education, the relationship between higher educational reforms and economic performance, curriculum development, student assessment and the job market; for example, [8] and [9]. Another group of researchers has particularly examined the internationalization of the higher education sector, university rankings, building world-class universities, collaborative research centres, research funding, and so forth (e.g. [10]-[11]-[12])

Specifically, some scholars have paid attention to assorted themes such as the impact of individual researcher productivity on university performance, journal rankings, bibliometrics of specific areas and journals, and related issues (e.g. [13]-[14]-[15]). Importantly, there is a growing research interest in higher educational reforms, performance of higher educational institutions, university systems, research assessments, and university rankings in the world. [12]-[15]. In an organisation, strategic planning is very important [16]. Looking at the scenario, a strategic planning process is required in the development of a mission statement for the organisation. The mission statement incorporates the organization's purpose and vision for the future [19].

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design. Focus group session was conducted with junior academic staff of a public university in Malaysia. Focus groups are a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate data [20]. Although group interviews are often used simply as a quick and convenient way to collect data from several people simultaneously, focus groups explicitly use

group interaction as part of the method. This means that instead of the researcher asking each person to respond to a question in turn, the research participants are encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on each other's experiences and points of view. The method is particularly useful for exploring people's knowledge and experiences which can be used to examine not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way. In this study, the junior academic staff were asked to discuss on the challenges that they have encountered in order to publish journal paper. Their opinion on steps to be taken in increasing publication were then obtained. The data from the focus group session was used to identify strategic approaches that could be implemented in increasing publication among the junior academic staff. The discussion among the junior academic staff was recorded in two ways: note taking and recording. Data were then analysed and themed according to the strategy. The findings are presented in the following section

3. Results and Discussion

The objectives of this study are to understand young academic staff' challenges in publishing journal paper and to obtain their opinion on steps to be taken in increasing publication. Based on the focus group interview, the strategic approaches that have been suggested by the young academic staff are as follow.

3.1 Strategic Approach 1: Leading/Involvement in Research Grant

Every young academic staff should be given opportunity to lead their own research grant. This is imperative as to ensure they can go out to do data collection. It is also suggested that in every research grant application, at least one young academic staff should be invited or involved in the research team. This strategy could be implemented in order to train young academic staff in the grant management aspect as well as in publishing the research findings. Young academic staff may take turns in applying for a research grant and identify their own research team members to sustain their involvement in research grant.

3.2 Strategic Approach 2: Co-Authoring

Another strategic approach is by giving more opportunities to young academic staff to co-write with senior academic staff. In normal practice, the senior academic staff will invite the young academic staff to co-write with them. However, it could be seen that not all young academic staff are invited to co-write. Thus, it is important for the senior academic staff to include in the junior academic staff to write with them as to develop their publications skills.

3.3 Strategic Approach 3: Collaboration with Industries

Collaboration could be done between young academic staff and organisations such as industries, schools or NGOs. These types of collaborations could be a platform or medium for young academic researcher to collect current and authentic data. Data could be obtained through discussion, meeting, or focus group interview. However, permission to publish data should be obtained. Young academic staff may also come out with research report or handbook.

3.4 Strategic Approach 4: Big Data Concept

Lacks of data could be one of the challenges that impede young academic staff to publish journals. The main cause to this issue is usually because the young academic staff do not lead any research grant. However, one way to obtain data is through the use of big data. Centres of faculty, as well as the administration should allow young academic staff to utilise and make use of big data (e.g. students' profile, background, demographic, activities, etc.) to be investigated according to the area involved and later publish as research findings. Data could also be obtained from any talk, seminar or training given by the young academic staff to students, or even outside participants. The young academic staff should be creative enough to work on the data.

3.5 Strategic Approach 5: Increase Intervention Studies

Data obtained from own classrooms whether through mini research or students' reflection should also be considered for research. The data could be massive thus increase chances for high indexed journal publication. Survey method could also be done in the form of intervention studies so that the data could be findings for journal publication.

3.6 Strategic Approach 6: Strategic Partnership

Another approach that could be implemented is strategic partnership between supervisor and students. Young academic staff should train their supervisee to write and publish together with them. Students should be coached to write and their work should be read and checked by their supervisor. Suggested best practice in producing a good research paper is by having at least five times of reading and correcting.

4. Conclusion

Based on the strategic approaches, it could be seen that the young academic staff will have to strategize their publication in order to meet the key performance indicator set by the university. The six strategic approaches discussed in this paper could be among the initial initiatives in increasing number of publications among young academic staff at public and private universities in Malaysia particularly. The implication of this study is that the junior academic staff need a lot of support from the management and administration at the faculty and at the university level. In the future, it is suggested that research is done on the process of academic writing among the junior academic staff. The process of writing is vital in preparing a sustainable framework in publishing research in high impact journals.

Acknowledgment

References

[1]   HW. Marsh. J. Hattie. The relation between research productivity and teaching effectiveness: Complementary, antagonistic, or independent constructs?. The Journal of Higher Education. 2002 Sep 1;73(5):603-41

[2]   A Aghaei Chadegani, H Salehi , M Yunus, H Farhadi, M Fooladi, M Farhadi, N Ale Ebrahim. A comparison between two main academic literature collections: Web of Science and Scopus databases. Asian Social Science. 2013 Apr 27;9(5):18-26.

[3]   N Ale Ebrahim, H Salehi, MAcEmbi, F Habibi, H Gholizadeh, SM Motahar, A Ordi. Effective strategies for increasing citation frequency. International Education Studies. 2013 Oct 23;6(11):93-9.

[4]   M Fooladi, H Salehi, MM Yunus, M Farhadi, AA Chadegani, H Farhadi, NA Ebrahim. Does criticisms overcome the praises of journal impact factor?. arXiv preprint arXiv:1305.0379. 2013 May 2.

[5]   A Togia, S Korobili. Attitudes towards open access: A meta-synthesis of the empirical literature. Information Services & Use. 2014 Jan 1;34(3-4):221-31.

[6]   Blackburn RT, Lawrence JH. Faculty at work: Motivation. Expectation, Satisfaction (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hophins University Press, 1995). 1995;116.

[7]   HA Williams.   A mediated hierarchical regression analysis of factors related to research productivity of human resource education and workforce development postsecondary faculty..

[8]   N Jabnoun. The influence of wealth, transparency, and democracy on the number of top ranked universities. Quality Assurance in Education. 2015 Apr 7;23(2):108-22.

[9]   S Yaisawarng, YC Ng. The impact of higher education reform on research performance of Chinese universities. China Economic Review. 2014 Dec 1;31:94-105.

[10]   C Daraio, A Bonaccorsi, L Simar. Rankings and university performance: A conditional multidimensional approach. European Journal of Operational Research. 2015 Aug 1;244(3):918-30.

[11]   M Saisana, B d'Hombres, A Saltelli. Rickety numbers: Volatility of university rankings and policy implications. Research policy. 2011 Feb 1;40(1):165-77.

[12]   B Millot. International rankings: Universities vs. higher education systems. International Journal of Educational Development. 2015 Jan 1;40:156-65.

[13]   G Abramo, T Cicero, CA D'Angelo. The impact of unproductive and top researchers on overall university research performance. Journal of informetrics. 2013 Jan 1;7(1):166-75.

[14]   N Ale Ebrahim, H Salehi. Maximize visibility: a way to increase citation frequency. UM HIR SPECIAL FEATURE (27 May 2013). 2013 May 27:1-5..

[15]   H Farhadi, H Salehi, M Yunus, A Aghaei Chadegani, M Farhadi, M Fooladi, N Ale Ebrahim. Does it matter which citation tool is used to compare the h-index of a group of highly cited researchers?. Australian journal of basic and applied sciences. 2013 Mar 27;7(4):198-202.

[16]   K Bracker, K Ramaya. Examining the impact of research and development expenditures on Tobin's Q. Academy of Strategic Management Journal. 2011;10:63.

[17]   KW Green Jr , B Medlin. The strategic planning process: The link between mission statement and organizational performance. Academy of Strategic Management Journal. 2003 Jan 1;2:23.

[18]   J Kitzinger. Qualitative research: introducing focus groups. Bmj. 1995 Jul 29;311(7000):299-302.