

Do Quality or Quantity of Research Work Walk Hand in Hand with Academic Recognition?

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A career of a professional researcher, academic, scientist increasingly depends on his or her academic output – in the process of hiring, promotions as well as grant awards (Feist, 1997). Different countries rely on various system to monitor the performance of the researchers, where this monitoring is primarily based on different point-based evaluations, where publications and research outputs are awarded a certain number of points based on the category of the publication and the database the publication is listed in. Journal citation report, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar and many other, which monitor the “acceptance” of a certain publication among academics often tailor the career of an individual. While the “metric” approach sadly often overlooks the quality and primarily the impact, the very straightforward system overrides the popularity of more complex system such as Research excellence framework (REF) in the UK, which focus on multiple angles of academic contribution in the society (Ravenscroft, Liakata, Clare, & Duma, 2017).

Accepting the metric normative for assessing the “impact” of researchers and academics, the key question is then whether the quality overrides quantity or not. In order to be recognized, should academics focus on producing a lot, while slightly setting aside the quality or do quality and recognition walk hand in hand? Interestingly, (Feist, 1997) shows that there is interestingly weak relationship between the quality and recognition of academics. Several other authors point to different problems in the prevailing research output assessment systems, based on citation (Korom, 2018; Larivière & Costas, 2016; Simonton, 2012; Sutherland, Goulson, Potts, & Dicks, 2011).

This paper studies the relationship between academic and research output and the quality of that output as well as the impact as measured by citation, contributing to the discussion regarding the importance of either quantity of publications. The higher number of publications increases the likelihood to be noticed, the quality of the output increases the likelihood for stronger impact and recognition in terms of citation. Methodologically, the paper studies citation reports of 4 thousand Slovenian researchers.

The results show that the total academic performance, if measured by total number of points, is very strongly related to the number of points from the highest quality publications but has very weak relationship with the number of those best works. The lower quality publications are weaker correlated with the total output, indicating that for Slovenia the Feist fallacy might not entirely hold and that the quality matters more for academic performance if measured in points. Nonetheless, the citation, which is also an indicator of how renowned a researcher is similarly strongly related both to the quality as well as the quantity, indicating that quality alone does not ensure enough visibility.

The paper contributes to the discussion about the academic purpose and the measurement of “what a good researcher” should be. Sadly, there is no system in place at the moment, which would also incorporate the actual impact of the research work on human well-being which should be the ultimate test of the “quality and impact” of researchers.

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