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## Reconciling Challenges and Opportunities in Academic Scientific Writing

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# Academic Leadership Journal

## 1.0 Introduction

To initiate the governmental strategy in Thrust 2 of the Ministry of Higher Education Strategic Plan Core Thrusts launched in 2007, and to nurture “First Class Mentality”, in the currently running Ninth Malaysia Plan (2005-2010); the need is vital for the educational sector to pick up the drive to manifest it. The second thrust emphasizes on the strategy to raise the capacity for knowledge and innovation. For that, it is apt that the academia contributes towards the effort to achieve excellence. In addition, its fourth thrust that is enhancement in teaching and learning; and the fifth thrust that is strengthening further initiatives in research and innovation are greatly emphasised in response to the ever changing environment and global competitiveness (Kamaruzaman & Siti Akmar 2008). These are basis in which the initiative for writing and publication amongst academics can be established.

Being an academician not only entails teaching, getting involved in students’ affair and activities, but also conducting research, creating and innovating, providing professional services and up to this juncture, entrepreneurship. To enhance the role of every faculty member, that is, to move forward in the academic track, it is necessary to find the relevant requirements and expectations for future promotion in the academic career path. It is at this point that the academic obligation sees the significance of writing and publishing as the continuum of excellence in the pursuit to manifest the core thrusts mentioned above.

However, issues pertaining to this obligation needs to be addressed for the academic to attain excellence. It is clear that it is beneficial not only for the junior academicians, but also for those in the senior level to be in the bandwagon of writing and publication. Writing and publication in the academia sets several purposes that are achievable with correct guidance and ever ready support from every party. From the institutional perspective, being prolific in writing and publication enhances peer recognition, promotes new knowledge, sets credentials for promotion, maintain academic sustainability, not to mention the least, for some, monetary incentives. To provide this support, vital issues need to be addressed in order to reap the bounty.

## 2.0 Taking Challenges as Opportunities

In October 2007, the MOHE National Strategic Plan which comprises seven strategic thrusts, assumed to act as the foundation for the way forward in the higher education system. These are: widening of access and increasing equality, improving the quality of teaching, enhancing research and innovation, strengthening of higher education institutions, intensifying and enculturation of life-long learning and reinforcing delivery system of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). These strategies complement the ever growing number of students enrolling in Malaysian higher education, both in the public as well as private institutions of higher education. Hence, this is great opportunity to be seized of this growing sector to create a quality higher education (Radin, 2008).

In one of the concerns, academic scientific writing may appeal to many academics whose

understanding of its significance has initiated publication in several genres. Nevertheless, institutions of higher education still see the potential to expedite this obligation. Malaysian higher education still stands at the bottom end in the scientific and journal articles per million people (Andersson, 2009), less than two hundred, which indicates that there seems to be insufficient drive to promote writing and publication of these genres. This has also been indicated in the University publication repository of among academicians that yet have to start writing and publication. In one instance, a record of one hundred and fifty lecturing staff, the repository indicated only eight contributors, a number that certainly needs further consideration for a serious drive.

Then the much talked about databases of Scopus and ISI Thomson. For some, this has set certain institutions of higher education expediting publication drive amongst the academics. A category of worthy publication is in the citation indexed journals (Kamaruzaman et al. 2008). This type of publication began in the 1950s. It has been responsible in tracking references that authors put in the bibliographies of published papers. Different genres of scientific paper are published in several indexed databases and also via electronic publication. The publication has been dominated by the Institute for Scientific Information (now Thomson Scientific), the creator and publisher of the three citation indexes which are available today namely, Science Citation Index (SCI), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) and Arts & Humanities Citation Index (AHC).

For junior academicians and those who have not been prolific, being in association with senior prolific ones is highly encouraged. International publication considers a high role of editor-in-chief who is the guardian of scholarly record and he has to ensure that the published article has high quality scientifically and is free from error. The manuscripts written based on the opinions of other scientists have to be evaluated by the editor-in-chief, who may be renowned academician, through his judgments on the quality of submitted papers. This evaluative undertaking is known as peer review process. This is an exercise applied to several kinds of scholarly activities, and it is centrally done on the scholarly journal articles publication. The main criteria of article acceptance decided upon by the editor-in-chief includes 'the dissemination of current knowledge, archiving of the canonical knowledge base, quality control of published information and assignment of priority and credit for their (editor's) work to authors' (Kamaruzaman et al. 2008).

### 3.0 Enhancement of Academic Scientific Writing through Leadership

An initiative undertaken by senior members of the university is the role that they play to enhance academic scientific publication. Holding the position as a professor, for example, displays the performance of developmental role. He is a critical resource of a university. A professor possesses a range of skills and knowledge which contribute significantly to the quality of the institution by providing academic leadership. The role includes demonstrating and fostering excellence in research, teaching, professional activities. Their role as publication initiator has to be nurtured as they do not emerge in the institution suddenly. Nevertheless, in the pool of academic leadership, professors are a rich reservoir of knowledge and are able to provide leadership not only in research, but also in supervision, publication, professional service, consultation and a host of other academic undertakings. Ideally, they must have possessed impact at international and national levels. Professors are to nurture and guide junior academics, although seemingly, there are those who are good leaders, but not good mentors. Academic leadership also involves networking, which is useful in bringing research from abroad. To achieve this, one has to publish in respectable journals. A good leader must also have effective public

relation skills. It is often said that a good leader is someone who can get things done by other people who share the same vision. A good leader not only should be able to share his or her vision with others, but also has the ability to manage the junior academics for future promotional development; and one of the credentials includes writing and publication.

In his additional duty, a professor is seen to be serving as research leaders through his guidance to junior staff and graduate students. With his experience, a professor assists other academia to secure grants for research projects by providing teamwork leadership, participating in multidiscipline research, enhancing networking, assisting in publication and research management. This professional duty of assisting in publication can be achieved, when the pool of professors in institutions of higher education is synergized to obtain academic excellence (Radin, 2008).

Another way to get multiple-author papers on innovative topics is for a professor to have more good ideas than he can personally develop. Therefore, a professor who gives good idea(s) to a graduate student or a young academia sets to observe the academic work to develop the idea into a publishable paper. Here, in this collaboration, it is normal for both the younger academician's and professor's name to appear on the final paper. Although the younger one seems to do nearly all of the work, the professor contributes the initial idea, equipment and resources, and helps the student with difficulties along the way.

This above process is more than merely preparing an academic paper, it is teaching in a Master-Apprentice style. Besides benefitting the learning academics, it also increases the productivity of the professor and, by increasing the professor's reputation, makes it easier for him to obtain future financial support. Carried to an extreme, the professor will become a manager who writes proposals for financial support, generates new ideas, and allocates resources, but he may not necessarily be personally involved in scientific research. In addition, he also acts as the paper publisher link to these young unknown authors to get their papers published in renowned and reputable international citation index or high impact factor journals. In the long-run, removing the professor from personal involvement in doing experimental or theoretical work could decrease the rate at which the professor generates significant new ideas, and therefore research-led culture should sustain prolific professor to mould writing cadres.

Apart from the role of professors, institutions of higher education need the right leaders who can transform ideas into actions, to ensure that the transformation plan works. The output of research is publication. Though competitive, offering grants suggests research to be further enhanced. In a research university, the Key Performance Index (KPI) includes fulfilling publication requirements, acquiring research grants and expenditure and post doctoral appointment. However, it is pertinent to note that KPI should not only be just about numbers (quantity); but also it has to include the qualitative element that is the commitment of the staff. This country has always been good at building facilities, infrastructure, but it also requires good human resource. The pool should consist of the competent and the best that the institution can get in order that they are able to manage and transform ideas into actions. Hence, for this, we need good leaders.

Again, a professor appointed must fulfill these detailed criteria to uphold a stiff competition and standards to ensure the enhancement of higher education. His teaching experiences should display an excellent assessment and innovation in teaching. This includes supervision of postgraduates and providing research through consultancy and securing research contracts. They also ensure research

outputs through international publication in journals, citation indexed journals, books and proceedings. An extension of recognition as professors, they provide public and specialized services and thus, recognised for being consulted locally and internationally.

The fields of discipline have up to today suffered from the fragmentation and separation of knowledge (Zulkifli, 2009). It has been criticized that scholars create artefact knowledge that deviates from the reality. Scholars are those who make knowledge into science and retain it into separate entities. As a consequence the knowledge becomes meaningless. Such knowledge would not have an impact in the society until it can be merged together. Insofar as the 21st Century still sees that university has created silo of knowledge and this fragmenting should change. The community of scholar needs to see knowledge as part of nature in which the analogy is that of a tree. This tree of 'knowledge' branches out with emphasis on what is important above as well as on the ground. Hence, scholarship does not have to be made into a silo as total human quality is transformed with inter-connectivity. Therefore, cross-fertilization of disciplines synergizes the collaborative efforts of academics from multitudes of expertise to produce not only research records, but also transmission of knowledge through writing and publication.

## 6.0 Conclusion

In order to achieve the status of an ultimate university, academicians, from every level, have to perform diligently regardless of any rewards and acknowledgements that one would receive. This is where passion lies. In its final say, the ultimate university has its academics managing change as it seems to remain constant. With it comes the effort of transformation and innovation, in which with initiatives ensure transfer of knowledge via writing and paper publication. This initiative is to be undertaken by institutions of higher education, as they help to attain a status that not only represents high quality service in education, but also the sustainability of the education system and environment in which the institution of higher education lies.

Furthermore, to encourage junior academicians or perhaps the 'silent' senior faculty members to attain academic excellence through writing and publication, there is a need of information dissemination of its worth in getting one's academic or research papers to be published not only for institutional reason, but also for self-interest. They are advised to try getting published in journal of impact factor, citation indexed journal and refereed journals. It is advisable too that cooperation between the senior and junior faculty members is enhanced through engagement with co-authors and established or renowned researchers and paper writers, if necessary.

Nevertheless, the most vital element is the institutional support which should start from the university by giving opportunities to academic paper presenters to thrust on at world class congress, conference and seminar abroad. From this exposure and experiences, confidence and commitment, academicians ride on easily for publication to be enhanced, especially in journals of high impact factor. After all, for the top notch ranking of university, the number of publication is the key criteria of selection for highly acclaimed status of a research university.

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