

Focusing Research Publication on Global Issues: Evidence from the Philippines

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Abstract

Research in social sciences is meant to change or improve human life. Indeed, due to the complexity of life today, research is one of the best tools for change, innovation, development, and progress. The Commission on Higher Education has recently been quite aggressive in promoting research production and dissemination in all Philippine tertiary institutions. In turn, educational leaders have put pressure on educators. While conducting research has significantly increased in speed in the past few years, the number is still highly limited for those whose research outputs make it into publication. Many researchers may have the passion for publishing but do not know exactly how to go about it. Some who have managed to complete their manuscripts have had them rejected by the editorial board. Everyone is trying to get hold of the secrets of the editors. This paper presents the synthesis of a study from systematic content analysis of academic journals from 10 leading research-based educational institutions and organizations. The goal of the study was mainly to investigate how these journals' publications are aligned with the Millenium Developmental Goals. Findings reveal that there is a consistent trend in the areas where most publications abound, while other areas are left out. Additionally, practical steps to take in writing academic papers for publication are proposed for the purposes of meeting the real needs of people through research.

Keywords: Research, social sciences, Philippines, content analysis, publication

Introduction

Research organizations are on the rise in the Philippines. A number of consortia can be seen across the nation of different higher education institutions (HEIs) for the purposes of collaboration in research. Faculty in HEIs are mandated and feeling the pressure of having to increase their research capability. They are expected, not only to conduct research, but also to present it at conferences and, even more importantly, to publish it. For a large number of faculty members who have been accustomed to focus solely on instruction, this discussion is not the most enjoyable one. Yet, they now have to face it on a fairly regular basis.

As the pressure increases on the HEI faculty to produce and disseminate research, the number of research journals is increasing. In fact, some HEI administrators are pushing their institutions to run their institutional research journals. This increase in research journals has certainly created greater opportunities for publication. This increase can decrease the competition that used to be unavoidable to have one's manuscript published. It can, therefore, make it possible for more professors to publish their research. On the other hand, this plurality in journals and the need to have the majority conduct and publish their research at any cost may mean jeopardizing the quality of research outputs and research publication (Hardé, 2014).

It may not be far-fetched to state that a considerable number of HEI faculty are not well prepared to conduct and publish research (Lertputtarak, 2008; Wichian, Wongwanich, & Bowarnkitiwong, 2009). For those who may have been well prepared in conducting research, a number of them may have never received proper training on how to write for publication. The result of these two issues is threefold. First, the quality of research is compromised. Second, more and more research is conducted and published that is less and less connected to real social issues. Automatically, these two can lead to the next issue: several manuscripts are rejected. For quality journals, it is not uncommon to see fewer manuscripts published than those that were rejected.

With globalization now crossing all the different layers of society, researchers are expected to address local issues from the global perspective. As far as the world is concerned today, the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) are at the center of discussion. As this project comes to an end, everyone is expected to evaluate its impact on the world, starting with the local community. Using the academic publications from 10 major research HEIs and organizations, this paper synthesizes the trend of publications in the Philippines as related to MDGs. It ends with some recommendations to follow to be able to conduct and publish research that can truly make a difference in the lives of people, both at the local and global levels. These recommendations help taking research to a new level by helping to link research to real social issues that have already been identified.

Review Of The Literature

The National Higher Education Research Agenda-2 (NHERA-2) of the Philippines, which is set for the years 2009-2018, stipulates that "knowledge creation, transmission and application are the lifeblood of the knowledge-based economy" and higher education institutions are expected to play an important role in these important activities (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2009, p. i). NHERA-2's main objective is to help the country "produce high quality research that will advance learning and national development, as well as international comparability of the Philippine higher education system" (CHED, 2009, p. ii). From these statements, it is evident that it is not a mandate of HEIs to focus primarily on instruction. They should focus on research more than on instruction, as far as the CHED is concerned. As much as some considerable focus has been placed on conducting, producing, and publish research, progress in this direction is quite slow. This paper reviews the problems related to this phenomenon, synthesizes the past focus of research done on publication in the recent past, and the current trends of research publication in the Philippines. Additionally, the paper synthesizes the recommendations that have been consistent with this topic of research publication in the past 3 decades.

Three Major Problems

Research on HEI faculty involvement in research publications has led to the conclusion that there are three major problems that are related to the discussion. The first problem has to do with the limited number of publication (Bay Jr. & Clerigo, 2013; Gonzalez, 2006; Nuqui & Cruz, 2012; Salazar-Clemeña, 2006; Wa-Mbaleka, 2014). The second one is related to the limited visibility of Filipino scholars on the international arena of publications (Salazar-Clemeña, 2006). The third one is about the limited application of research into practice (Bero et al., 1998; Boyer, 1990), which leads to the disconnect between research or theory and practice. Each of these problems plays an important role in the production, publication, and dissemination of research-based knowledge.

On the first problem, the number of HEI currently publishing their research in scholarly journals is considerably small, in general. This trend is no different in the Philippines (Valencia & Gonzalez, 2007). In their study, Valencia and Gonzalez (2007) discovered that the number of faculty members appearing in science international journals was highly limited. As for the few Filipino who managed to publish in such journals, a good number was based on collaboration between Filipino scholars and foreign scholars. Of those studies evaluated, only 50% had Filipino scholars as lead authors. About 325 was the average of international publications completed in the field of science from all the schools in the Philippines, during the period of 1998-2002. A similar bibliometric analysis found that only about a third of papers from faculty make it to publication in the Philippines (Salazar-Clemeña, 2006).

To increase the number of research publications, Salazar-Clemeña and Almonte-Acosta (2007) proposed that the focus should be on improving the culture of research in the Philippines. According to them, this culture depends on several factors, including, but not limited to institutional research policies and agenda, developmental culture and working conditions, budget for research, infrastructure, collaboration with and access to research professionals in other institutions, policies and guidelines about research benefits and incentives, research committees, and publications. From this long list, it is evident that there is a combination of factors that lead to the low amount of research being produced and disseminated.

From what is presented above, it gives one of the reasons why the work of Filipino scholars is not strongly evident on the global arena. When the amount of publications is already limited, even fewer manuscripts will survive the scrutiny of the international standards. Additionally, if the research skills are limited even on the national scale (Salazar-Clemeña & Almonte-Acosta, 2007), it would surely make it difficult for the manuscripts to be accepted for publication in quality international journals.

The last important problem is that the research divide continues to be strong in HEI. Research is produced that does not have a direct application in real life. As seen in the literature, this issue has been around for decades (see for instance, Bero et al., 1998; Boyer, 1990). As long as research continues to be taught too mechanically without direct application to real life, research scholars will continue to widen the research divide that leaves research outputs out of clear implementation.

Focus of Past Research on Publication

The topic of research publication has been around for decades. Over the years, different aspects of the same topic have been investigated. Some studies have focused mainly on the gap between research and practice (Bero et al., 1998; Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Pick,

1978; Saxena, Pratap, & Saraceno, 2004; Titler, 2007). Such studies have been conducted mainly to raise the awareness of connecting research to real social problems of people.

Other studies in the past have dealt with research and HEI faculty (Bay Jr. & Clerigo, 2013; Boyer, 1990; Goodwin & Sauer, 1995; Salazar-Clemeña & Almonte-Acosta, 2007). For authors of such studies, they know that HEI faculty play an important role in conducting, producing, and disseminating research. Yet, HEI work demands may not allow them to produce and disseminate as much research as needed. Studies on this topic have focused mainly on understanding what is involved in the process of faculty research production

A number of studies have been conducted on the factors that can either hinder or enhance HEI faculty research productivity (Chen, Gupta, & Hoshower, 2004, 2006; Salazar-Clemeña & Almonte-Acosta, 2007). A plethora of those factors has been documented, such as time, resources, research skills, writing skills, and both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Analyzing extrinsic motivation has led to some other studies to investigate faculty competition in research productivity and publication (see for instance, Fox, 1992).

The last aspect that has probably been quite important and continues to occupy the center stage today is the quality of manuscripts that are submitted for publication (Fischer, 2011; Hardé, 2014; Ioannidis, 2005). It is true that today, most journals that promote quality lay out clearly their editorial policies for potential authors and readers to judge by themselves the quality of works being published. It is not, however, uncommon to find well-planned policies not being ignored during the actual editorial and peer-review work. While managers of journals may espouse the philosophy of quality of scholarly publications, some do not enforce their rules to the letter when it comes to the whole editorial process.

Current Trends of Research in Publication in the Philippines

Based on publications in the past 5 years, three major trends seem to emerge. First, more and more research is focused on the need for capability building for HEI faculty (Acar, 2012; Calma, 2009, 2010; CHED, 2009; Wa-Mbaleka, 2014). This focus is probably because most leaders have realized that the only way to produce more research and better outputs, more attention must be placed on training HEI faculty in needed skills.

The topic of research productivity continues to be investigated (see for instance, Aguilar et al., 2013; Calma, 2009; Dumbrique & Alon, 2013; Nuqui & Cruz, 2012; Salmingo, 2011). This issue continues to persist in research probably because HEI faculty continue to be expected to produce and publish scholarly research. They have probably not been meeting that expectation.

The last issue that is current on the research done about publication continues to be that of quality of research publication (Cheung, 2009; Djuwari, 2013; Japos, 2012; Padua, 2011). It is quite encouraging to see that the issues of research productivity, research capability building, and the quality of research publication are being investigated concurrently. These three issues are interconnected and must be equally addressed as the Philippines continues to aim for higher international recognition.

In addition to the many issues discussed above, one more aspect that has not been considered is the focus of Philippine publications on the MDGs. Yet, this theme is the world project that has been ongoing for more than a decade now, and coming to an end soon. The current study aimed at investigating research publication in social sciences from the MDGs. This perspective was important to investigate how a number of leading research HEIs and organizations are helping in monitoring and meeting the expectations of MDGs. This study was highly needed because it has not been conducted. Additionally, according to NHERA-2,

the first objective is to “Improve research capability of HEIs, particularly the Philippine universities whose main business is to generate knowledge towards international competitiveness” (CHED, 2009, p. 1). With the world focused primarily on MDGs, it would only make sense that a country that is concerned with international competitiveness would focus on the eight MDGs.

This study was based on two main research questions:

1. What is the current publication performance of the best Philippine institutions/ organizations in relation to MDGs?
2. What model can be suggested to sustain the ongoing improvement of publications?

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to investigate how publications from the top 10 universities of the Philippines align with MDGs. The study was a bibliometric analysis in a sense because it involves careful analysis of journals from the number of frequencies of articles on different topics of target—in this case, MDGs. It can also be considered a descriptive study, given that it relies heavily on simple frequencies to identify the trends (Creswell, 2012) of publications on different MDGs.

Sampling

This study focused solely on publication in social sciences. This specific broad field was the target because it contains most of MDGs. Additionally, the researcher himself is from social sciences, thus giving him better background understanding of issues in the area. Purposive sampling was used to select top 10 higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines. The 10 were selected based on the 2014 independent ranking of Philippine HEIs according to webometrics.info. The following institutions, therefore, were included in the thorough search: University of the Philippines-Diliman, De La Salle University-Manila, University of the Philippines-Los Banos, University of the Philippines-Manila, Ateneo de Manila University, University of Santo Tomas, University of the Philippines-Mindanao, Aquinas University, and Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology.

The study focused on articles published between 2009-2013. These years were preferred as they were the first 5 years of NHERA-2. Year 2013 marked the middle of the 10-year mandate of NHERA-2 of the Philippine CHED. Only journals published in English were considered in the selection process.

To identify different journal publications, six major online databases were utilized. These six databases were used because they are known to be either the major repository of Philippine journal publications (first two) or because they hosted several journal articles published in the Philippines (next two) or simply because they were supposed to hold the repository of research funded by CHED (last two). It was assumed that any HEI or scholar in the Philippines that wishes to have high visibility in the Philippines would likely consider publishing with at least one of these databases. They included Philippine e-Journals (ejournals.ph), Philippine Online Journals (philjol.ph), International Association of Multidisciplinary Research (iamure.com), Philippine Association of Institutions for Research (Philair.com), National Research Council of the Philippines Journal (NRCP, nrpc.gov), and CHED-Commissioned Research (ched.gov). This last one was excluded because the last time its database was updated was 2003.

For journals to be included, they also needed to have at least 3 consecutive years of publication accessible online. They had to be accessible online during the time of the data

collection. This accessibility could be either through the identified online databases or the journal websites if available. One specific journal that seemed to align very well with MDGs, but did not meet all the selection criteria, was the Journal of Management and Global Sustainability (published by Ateneo de Manila University). Most of the articles in that journal are directly aligned with many of the MDGs. However, at the time of the data collection, the journal was only a year and half old.

For an article to be included, it needed to have been published between 2009 and 2013 and focused on MDGs in social sciences. Additionally, it did not matter whether it was a theoretical or an empirical study. Theoretical papers were considered because they are usually good for practical translation of research for practitioners' consumption.

Data Collection

All the six databases were thoroughly checked to identify the journals that fit the selection criteria. Journals had to be from the top 10 HEIs or be published by International Association of Multidisciplinary Research (IAMURE), Philippine Association of Institutions for Research (PAIR), or National Research Council of the Philippines (NRCP). These three databases were especially considered because they are highly visible in producing and disseminating research in the Philippines.

Results

After a manual thorough search of the five databases that qualified, journal after journal in four databases (excluding IAMURE and PAIR), 153 journals were identified. To start with, IAMURE and PAIR were removed because they had shared a number of their journal publications with Philippine e-Journals or Philjol. Table 1 presents the contribution of each of the four databases.

Table 1:

Retrieved Journals from Online Databases

	# of Journals	Potential	Included	Discontinued
Philippine e-Journals	110	19	11	8
Philjol	43	4	4	0
NRCP	1	1	1	0
CHED	1 site	1	0	1
TOTAL	153	25	16	9

From Table 1, it is clear that from the 153 identified journals, only 25 had some potential to provide needed information for the study. But due to the year of publication, only 16 were included. They can be seen in Appendix A.

A close analysis of the contribution of selected journals from different institutions and organization was done. It was based on the journals that met the selection criteria. Table 2 synthesizes all the institutions and organizations, and the number of journals that each contributed. For some of the top 10 institutions that are not included here, it does not mean that they do not have journals. It simply means that their journals did not fit the selection criteria.

Table 2:

Journal Contribution by Institution

Institution/Organization	# of Journals
IAMURE	6
Dela Salle University – Manila	3
Ateneo de Manila University	2
PAIR	1
Mindanao State University – Iligan	1
University of Santo Tomas	1
NCRP	1
CHED Commissioned Research	0

From Table 2, it is evident that IAMURE, one of the leading research organizations in the Philippines, contributed the highest number of journals, followed with Dela Salle – Manila, and Ateneo de Manila University. Because CHED's website was not updated, no study was included because none was available for the selected time (2009-2013).

Of the 16 journals that were selected, the analysis focused on the number of articles published every year. From the total number of publications, a careful analysis of article titles and abstracts was done to identify how many of them focused on the eight different MDGs. Data seems to show a fairly consistent increase in the focus of journals on MDGs. Of the 16 journals, the following focused on MDGs over the 5-years period: seven in 2009, eight in 2010, nine in 2011, a significant jump to 15 in 2012, and down to 13 in 2013.

Table 3 presents the statistical data on all the 8 MDGs: eradication of extreme poverty and hunger (MDG1), achievement of universal primary education (MDG2), promotion of gender equality and women empowerment (MDG3), reduction of child mortality (MDG4), improvement of maternal health (MDG5), fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases (MDG6), ensurance of environmental sustainability (MDG7), and development of a global partnership for development (MDG8), (United Nations, 2014).

Table 3:

MDG Highlights in the 16 Selected Journals

	# of Articles	MDG 1	MDG 2	MDG 3	MDG 4	MDG 5	MDG 6	MDG 7	MDG 8	Total MDG
2009	143	19	5	1		0	1	2	16	44
2010	222	14	11	3	0	0	2	4	7	41
2011	164	10	17	5	0	2	2	1	10	47
2012	394	34	22	8	0	8	17	16	33	136
2013	269	27	8	4	0	3	5	10	12	69
TOT.	1,202	102	63	21	0	13	27	33	78	337*

*22 studies dealt with 2 MDGs → total number of included articles: 337-22 = 315

From Table 3, it is evident that the number of articles published in 5 years in the journals that met the selection criteria was 1,202. Only 315 of them contributed to MDGs, that is, 26.2%. Of the 315 articles, 22 of them focused on two MDGs. The rest focused solely on one. The analysis of the production of articles over the 5 years shows that 2012 had the highest number of articles focused on MDGs; that is, 136 articles or 43%. On the other hand, 2010 yielded the lowest number of 41; that is, 13%.

A close look at the synthesis of the data in Table 3 leads to the beautiful, the bad, and the ugly in the contribution of articles to the discussion of MDGs. On the beautiful side, poverty had 32.4% of the publications, global partnership 24.8%, and universal primary education 20%. Worries can be seen in the 10.5% for environment sustainability and 6.7% for gender equality. The aspect least focused on in publications was .9% for HIV/AIDS and other diseases, .4% for maternal health, and 0% for child mortality.

Discussion And Conclusion

The findings of this study are alarming. First, only 16 of the 153 identified journals produced MDG-focused articles in the first 5 years of NHERA-2. That is only 10.5% of the journals. Second, of the 16 journals that met the inclusion criteria, only 315 out of 1,202 articles (or 26.2%) focused on MDGs. Of those that focused on MDGs, 77% focused only on three of the eight MDGs: eradication of poverty and hunger, development of global partnership, and universal primary education. For HIV/AIDS and other diseases, maternal health, and child mortality, the focus was less than 1%.

It is somehow possible that if journals from fields other than social sciences were included, the picture might have been different. As far as social sciences are concerned, it seems that a better balance needs to be obtained in the focus on different MDGs. Additionally, more focus on MDGs, in general, must be encouraged in publications so that the Philippines can continue to play an important role in the global scholarship by focusing on global issues.

Research And Publication Reorientation

In trying to improve the focus of research and publication on global issues, a model is proposed here (see Figure 1). The central theme must be MDGs. Of course, after MDGs come to an end, there will most likely be another global agenda. That agenda could then replace MDGs in this proposed model.

If research and publications in the Philippines, as well as in other countries, could focus more intentionally on the global agenda, we could start seeing much clearer partnership between theory and practice, researchers and practitioners, and academicians and those involved in implementing ideas. The divide between theory and practice could be narrowed.



Figure 1: Proposed Reorientation of Research on MDGs

From the proposed model above, once MDGs are at the center, everyone in their field will focus on the MDG that fits best for their field. All researchers will need to link their studies to both the global issue as it links to the research priorities of the country. Such a link can boost glocalization; that is, the contextualization of global issues or globalization of local issues. Each higher education institution would need to have research connected to both the country priorities and the global issues. Sound theories and adequate research designs would be needed to contribute to the international scholarship in the different fields. Such research and publication practices would help address local, national, and international issues, and give better chances for needed funding.

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Appendix A: 16 Included Journals

1. The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher (DLS-M):
<http://ejournals.ph/index.php?journal=TAPER>
2. The Asia-Pacific Social Sciences Review (DLS-M):
<http://ejournals.ph/index.php?journal=dlsu-apssr>
3. DLSU-M Business & Economics Review:
<http://ejournals.ph/index.php?journal=BER>
4. IAMURE International Journal of Business and Management
<http://ejournals.ph/index.php?journal=IAMURE-BAM>
5. IAMURE International Journal of Education
<http://iamure.com/publication/index.php/ije/issue/archive>
6. IAMURE International Journal of Health Education
<http://iamure.com/publication/index.php/ijhe/issue/archive>
7. IAMURE International Journal of Literature, Philosophy & Religion
<http://iamure.com/publication/index.php/ijlpr/issue/archive>
8. IAMURE International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research
<http://iamure.com/publication/index.php/iamure/issue/archive>
9. IAMURE International Journal of Social Sciences
<http://iamure.com/publication/index.php/ijss/issue/archive>
10. JPAIR Multidisciplinary Journal (PAIR)
<http://ejournals.ph/index.php?journal=JPAIRMJ>
11. Mindanao Forum (MSU) <http://ejournals.ph/index.php?journal=MF>
12. Banwa: A multidisciplinary Journal (UPMin)
<http://or.upmin.edu.ph/OJS/index.php/banwa/index>
13. Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture
<http://journals.ateneo.edu/ojs/index.php/budhi/index>
14. Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy (UST)
<http://www.philjol.info/philjol/index.php/KRIT>

15. Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints (Ateneo de Manila)
<http://www.philjol.info/philjol/index.php/PS>
16. NRCP Research Journal (National Research Council of the Philippines)
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