The Impact of E-Journals on the Malaysian Scholarly Community

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Abstract: *Electronic journals are a new scenario for the Malaysian scholarly community. Thus, this paper presents the positive and negative impacts of the scenario. Currently, Malaysian universities are competing with each other to be in the list of top ranked world universities. To achieve the target, academicians are under pressure to become visible by publishing their works in journals indexed by various international databases. Hence, publishing research findings in e-journals has become compulsory among the Malaysian academics. The aim of this study is to identify the impact of electronic journals on the Malaysian scholarly community. Policies implemented by Malaysian universities pertaining to the rules for publishing works in electronic journals were studied. In addition, this study focuses on the impact of electronic journals on the academician career path, promotional exercise and rewards received by Malaysian scholars. The study includes input and responses by leaders of the Academician Association and directors and editors of university presses.*

Keywords: *Malaysia; scholarly publishing; electronic publishing; scholarly journal; academia.*

Introduction

Scholarly publishing in Malaysia has been undergoing rapid changes during the last two decades. The globalization of higher education and research institutions, university rankings and the emergence of electronic publishing especially for electronic scholarly journals are amongst the unprecedented changes that most universities and scholars in Malaysia have to face.

It has been 15 years since the first scholarly electronic journal was published in Malaysia. Ling, Mashkhuri & Pang (1997) pioneered the discussion with an overview of electronic publishing in Malaysia. In 1985, the first print version of *The Malaysian Journal of Computer Science* was published and 10 years later, in 1995, the first electronic version appeared on the Internet. Five years later, Roosfa (2000) recorded only six titles of electronic scholarly journals published by various institutions in Malaysia. During the 15-year period since 1995, the country experienced a remarkable increase in the number of scholarly electronic journals (Zainab, 1997a; Zainab, 1997b). To date, 25 Malaysian electronic scholarly journals are serving the world's scholars and researchers in various disciplines of knowledge. These electronic journals are among about 250 scholarly journals being published in the country. Hew (2001) focussed her discussion on the scholarly journal publishing in Malaysia.

Most of the scholarly journals in Malaysia are published by higher education institutions, especially by the public universities. With nearly 30 million population, the Malaysian government has set up new public universities and higher education institutions to serve the need for higher learning. MASTIC (2004) reported on the science and technology knowledge productivity in Malaysia in its bibliometric study.

In 2009, 20 public universities in Malaysia registered the enrollment of 121,323 students with 13.7% in various postgraduate programs. To fulfill the need of producing more professionals and scientists, the Malaysian universities are also increasing the number of students in 'critical' areas. There are

116,684 students enrolled in various programs such as pharmacy (2.6%), dentistry (1.4%), medicine (8.4%), law (8.7%), accountancy (19.8%) and engineering (59.1%).

The Higher Education Ministry is working seriously towards getting more international students onto the Malaysian university campuses. In 2009, the ministry recorded 22,389 international students enrolled with the biggest number of students from Iran (17.9%), Indonesia (16.5%), China (9.4%), Libya (5.3%) and Iraq (5.2%). In this circumstance, Malaysian public universities have to offer qualified and experienced lecturers conducting courses at various levels. In the same year, the ministry recorded 26,742 academic staff in public higher education institutions in Malaysia with 6,946 (26.0%) of them holding a doctorate qualification. Malaysian higher institutions are also served by foreign expatriates with the number of 1,428 out of the total number of academicians.

The Malaysian government is also targeting more international students to change the country's image into a higher learning hub for the region. To achieve this aspiration the facilities at the universities are being upgraded, especially the science laboratories; the number of research grants was increased, and the number of qualified lecturers is also being increased by focusing on increasing the number of lecturers with Ph.D. In addition, five public universities were upgraded to be research universities with one of the universities becoming an APEX university.

Research universities are expected to receive more research grants in the future years. Apart from that, the academicians in all these universities are being given more work and responsibilities. Nevertheless, their promotion and career path will depend on the outcome of their research, especially the number of articles published in journals listed in the international databases. Currently, only selected international databases are considered by the universities in the appraisal process of their academic staff. Therefore, the chances for the academicians to publish their works in journals listed in these databases are very slim especially for those in the area of arts, humanities and social sciences. Basically, this paper begins with a brief historical backdrop of scholarly journal publishing in Malaysia. This is followed by a discussion of the new trends in higher education in Malaysia. Emphasis is subsequently placed on the opinions of the actors among the prominent scholarly figures in Malaysia as well as the professionals of university presses in Malaysia. The paper closes with potential lessons for policy.

Historical Backdrop

The history of scholarly journal publishing in Malaysia started 165 years ago. *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia* was the first scholarly journal published in Malaya (1847-1862). This was followed by *Journal of Eastern Asia* which appeared in 1875. Both journals were owned and published by individuals. The earliest journal published by a scholarly society was *The Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (*JSBRAS*) which came out in 1878. The journal then changed its title to *The Journal of Malaya Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (*JMBRAS*).

Basically, scholarly journals published in the early twentieth century aimed to serve the interests of the British colonial officers. The British set up many departments and research institutes, namely The Institute of Medical Research, Rubber Research Institute, Agriculture Department, Forestry Department and the States Museum. Among the journals published during that period were the *Agricultural Bulletin of the Malay Peninsula* (1891), *Journal of the Straits Medical Association* (1892), *Perak Museum Notes* (1893), *Sarawak Museum Journal* (1911), *The Planter* (1920), *Medical Bulletin* (1923) and *Quarterly Journal of the Rubber Research Institute of Malaya* (1929).

The first scholarly journal published by a university was *Jernel Fakulti Kejuruteraan Universiti Malaya*. It was a journal published by the Engineering Faculty in the University of Malaya in 1958. Four years later, in 1962, the journal changed its title to *Journal of Department of Engineering University of Malaya*. Lim (1975) elaborated on the problems of publishing scholarly journals in Malaysia. Stone (1975) elaborated on the scholarly serial publications of academic institutions and societies in Malaysia during 1970s.

To accomplish the need for higher education, the government developed more universities. Much research on documentation of Malaysian scholarly journals has been conducted since the middle of the twentieth century, such as Tiew (1998, 1999 and 2003). *JMBRAS* remains as the longest surviving scholarly journal in Malaysia, from 1878 until now.

Currently there are about 250 Malaysian journals on the market, facing many challenges and problems. Lack of professionalism among the editors, poor refereeing systems, bureaucracy and financial problems and too many general and multidisciplinary journals competing to get articles from the same group of authors are among the common problems faced by most of the journals. Hence, these problems result in the shortage of good articles published. In addition, low quality and lateness of publication of up to 2-3 years are a common scenario for some Malaysian journals. The majority of the Malaysian academicians are bilingual because the Malaysian education system provides them with communication skills in Malay Language and English. If they decide to contribute their articles only to international journals abroad, this will affect the local journals badly.

The attitude among the majority of Malaysian scholars, who now publish their work in e-journals abroad, has had this effect. Presently, Malaysian scholars' performance is rated according to their articles published in e-journals, especially those listed in the ISI or Scopus databases. They have to send their articles to journals published abroad because there are only thirty-five Malaysian journals listed in Scopus and five in ISI. Consequently, what will happen to local scholarly journals in Malaysia? To date, there are about 250 scholarly journals on the market. The move to encourage Malaysian scholars to publish their works in journals listed in international databases such as ISI and Scopus is a positive effort in increasing the visibility of Malaysian authors. Nevertheless, there should be a mechanism for sustaining and positioning senior Malaysian scholars, especially in arts, social sciences and humanities in their academic advancement. Other international journal databases are even better in terms of maturity and subject area coverage. This paper will also study the impact of publishing in international electronic journals on scholarly book publishing. Directors and editors of university press were contacted to give their views.

The Impact of Electronic Journals

The importance of diversifying into electronic media is still a hot topic among the Malaysian academicians. Despite the increasing number of Malaysian works published and listed in internationally indexed journals, there is always a negative side of the scenario. Harris (2008) discussed the ranking of journals.

Positive Impacts

University of Malaya (UM) acknowledges the contributions of its academic staff who publish their work in ISI journals. The university is giving incentives to academics for their publications that are indexed within the year. Hence, the University of Malaya has outlined its reward incentive policy: except for single authorship, claims for multiple UM authors must be initiated by one of the authors and must be approved by the other authors. For publications with more than one UM author, any author can make the claim, but approvals must be obtained from all co-authors. Amounts to be apportioned between the co-authors will be decided among the authors themselves. Each author can only claim a maximum amount of RM50,000 in a publication year.

Impact Among Academicians – Looking Abroad

Searching, quoting, citing and referencing fellow researchers' works became easier with e-journals. E-journals enable the researchers, including the academicians, and their research work to be visible to other researchers globally. In addition, e-journals listed in the international databases contribute to the better rankings of the university. These are among the benefits of publishing in e-journals.

In a recent development, Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) only uses ISI data in its university rankings mechanism. University of Malaya followed this step by only taking into consideration its academicians' works published in the ISI database. The works published in journals listed in other databases including Scopus carry no weight. Recent developments prove that University of Malaya's efforts have yielded positive results although this was implemented only a few years ago. The university was listed among the top 200 universities in the THES 2009 list. On the other hand, Malaysian research universities are trying to obtain the highest number of records in ISI Web of Science (ISI WoS). This healthy competition is presented in Tables 1-4.

Table 1. Malaysian published works in ISI WoS and Scopus by Malaysian research universities, 2010

Universities	ISI WoS	Scopus
UM	361	389
USM	366	428
UKM	166	229
UPM	216	333
UTM	85	130

Note: UM = University of Malaya, USM = Universiti Sains Malaysia, UKM = Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, UPM = Universiti Putra Malaysia, UTM = Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

Table 2. Citations/record of Malaysian universities in ISI WoS and Scopus, 2005-2009

Universities	Number of records		Citations		Citations/record	
	ISI	Scopus	ISI	Scopus	ISI	Scopus
UM	3840	4693	6315	7506	1.64	1.60
USM	3612	4537	6914	8755	1.91	1.93
UKM	2608	4048	3004	4516	1.15	1.12
UPM	2612	4124	3359	4763	1.29	1.15
UTM	1330	2092	1494	2344	1.12	1.12

Table 3. Ratio of citations/academician among Malaysian universities ISI WoS and Scopus

Universities	Number of citations 2005-2009		Number of academicians	Citations/academician 2005-2009	
	ISI	Scopus	2008*	ISI	Scopus
UM*	6315	7506	2077	3.04	3.61
USM*	6914	8755	1780	3.88	4.92
UKM**	3004	4516	1563	1.92	2.89
UPM*	3359	4763	1938	1.73	2.46
UTM*	1494	2344	1905	0.78	1.23

Table 4. Ratio of records/academicians among Malaysian universities

Universities	# of records 2005-09		Academicians 2008	Records/academics 2005-09	
	ISI	Scopus		ISI	Scopus
UM*	3840	4693	2077	1.85	2.26
USM*	3612	4537	1780	2.03	2.55
UKM**	2608	4048	1563	1.67	2.59
UPM*	2612	4124	1938	1.35	2.13
UTM*	1330	2092	1905	0.70	1.10

Source: *Statistics from Planning and Research Division, the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia
** Malaysian Research University data 2010.

Impact on Local Journals – More Visibility

The electronic journal has changed the direction of many journal publishers and editors in Malaysia. Currently, they are working more towards having their journals listed in international index services. In addition, the Ministry of Higher Education is monitoring the status of Malaysian universities in the world university rankings. Due to that, Malaysian universities are concentrating their effort on increasing their academicians' visibility in international indexing and abstracting services. Since

THES is using ISI's Web of Science (WoS) in measuring a university's citation performance, more Malaysian journals are now focusing on publishing in journals whose contents are listed in indexing services such as WoS. To date, there are 11 Malaysian journals listed in ISI WoS and another 44 in Scopus. Although the total number of Malaysian journals in ISI and Scopus is small compared to the total number of journals published in Malaysia, the figure is increasing steadily year by year. Nevertheless, many local journals are facing difficulties in getting good manuscripts from renowned authors. At the same time, the number of titles in terms of books and monographs published by university presses in Malaysia is dropping tremendously as confirmed by Salleh Yaapar, the Director of USM Press and Abdul Manaf Saad, the Director of UM Press. Furthermore, Saadah Jaafar, a senior editor (social sciences and humanities) at UKM Press expressed her concern at the latest development where authors are more interested in revising and publishing their theses or dissertations as journal papers than turning them into books or monographs.

Impact on the Career Path

As noted, Malaysian universities and the Ministry of Higher Education are encouraging university lecturers to publish their research work in e-journals. The number and the impact factor of articles published in Scopus and ISI influence the career path of Malaysian scholars especially in the process of recruitment of new academicians and in the promotion exercise. The promotion practice and the recruitment process of a new academician are also influenced by their publications in e-journals, especially those journals listed in the Scopus or ISI databases. The reason behind this policy is mainly that ISI WoS database is being used by the THES in its university rankings process.

In the University of Malaya, a candidate for the position of university lecturer must not only hold a doctorate degree but must also have published his or her work in a journal listed in the ISI database. Academicians of research universities in Malaysia also need to publish their works in ISI journals for their promotion to higher positions. But, compared to University Malaya, other research universities accept works published in journals listed in Scopus as well as ISI. The move was aimed at increasing the visibility of Malaysian scholars. The example of promotion criteria for UM staff is presented in Table 5. Books accepted for promotion are only those published by an established international publisher or a recognized local or international university press including UM Press.

Table 5. Promotion criteria for non-science disciplines at University of Malaya

# of publications required for promotion	Books	# of ISI / Refereed Articles in Top Tier Journals (Category A & B) / Chapters In Books
Professor A	6	**50**; at least **16** must be in Tier 1 & 2 ISI Journal
Professor B	4	**40;** at least **12** must be in Tier 1 & 2 ISI Journal
Professor C	2	**30;** at least **8** must be in an ISI Journal
Associate Professor	1	**15;** at least **4** must be in an ISI Journal
Senior Lecturer	-	**10;** at least **2** must be in an ISI Journal
Lecturer (for confirmation)	-	**5;** At least **1** must be in an ISI Journal after appointment to Lecturer post

Note: 1. Category A – Top 50 journals to be used for the whole faculty/academy
2. Category B – Top 50 journals to be used for each department in the faculty/academy

Brain Drain

The significant effect of the move is 'brain drain' among the research university senior lecturers and professors. They have published long lists of papers and articles in various journals in their field and this is the time for them to sit down and write books. Nevertheless, with the new university regulations, they still need to publish in high impact journals. To achieve the Key Performance Index (KPI), they must publish at least three papers in any high impact journal per year. Some senior professors have left the university to join new universities and some have even ended by doing nothing at home.

Due to the high expectation, there are cases where a candidate offered a junior position at University Malaya rejected the offer to accept a better offer at a new university. Senior professors who failed to achieve such KPI have to decide whether to accept a lower contract position or to end their career at the university. In the Malaysian service system, there are three levels of professor with grade A, B and C, where the most senior professor has professor A status. There are cases whereby a professor at the 'B' grade who failed to achieve the KPI accepted an offer to be in grade 'C' and in other cases a professor at 'C' grade rejected the offer to be in a lower position as an associate professor. In other scenarios, lecturers left research universities to join new universities to avoid the heavy burden of the working environment in research universities.

Associate Professor Aziz Abdul Rahman, Secretary General of the Academic Staff Association, University of Malaya, believes that the moving of the university academic staff from University of Malaya to various new universities is influenced by pull and push factors. Professors are terminated based on the fact that they failed to achieve the university's Key Performance Index, which requires them to publish their works in high impact indexed journals. At the same time, the professors were offered the same position at new universities. Both parties, the professors and the new universities, benefitted. To the association, this scenario cannot be looked at as 'brain drain' since the professors are still delivering their services at local universities.

Table 6. University of Malaya professors terminated (April 2011)

Academic Unit	N
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences	7
Faculty of Economics	2
Faculty of Education	1
Cultural Centre	1
Academy of Malay Studies	4

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study revealed the implications of electronic journals for academic enhancement in Malaysia. Undoubtedly, Malaysian universities, especially the research universities, are becoming more visible as their academic staff contribute to the increasing number of articles published by international journals which are indexed by international index services such as ISI WoS and Scopus.

Nevertheless, the requirement to publish in international electronic journals has become a big challenge or an obstacle for senior academicians to advance in their academic career. Besides, the exercise discourages students from joining the academic line due to the high expectations and publication policies. Consequently, some of the senior professors left the universities to join new universities as they could not achieve the requirement or targeted performing index set by the university.

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Workhops