

WEB VISIBILITY OF SCHOLARLY PRODUCTIVITY OF TEACHING STAFF OF OPEN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA

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INTRODUCTION

Universities have played the key role in knowledge production over the years while other sectors such as industrial, hospital, government those who actively participate in knowledge producing movements heavily depend on university expertise. Therefore, it is very important for the universities to make sure that they produce their share of knowledge towards the development of the country and for the wellbeing of mankind. Besides, both universities and scholars should pay attention to proper dissemination of solemnly earned outcomes with fellow colleagues and industrialists across the boundaries in order to inspire further research and encourage practical applications. Fortunately, the emergence of World Wide Web has launched new avenues for scholars and scientists in publishing and disseminating their work (Bauer & Backkalbasi, 2005). In addition, publishing in the web, opens up invaluable opportunities for the institutions and scholars to rise in their position in the webometric ranking, which is a widely accepted measurement of academic excellence. Hence, academic institutions all over the world are trying their best to enhance their web presence by reformatting their web policies and initiating open-access archives in order to increase the volume and quality of their electronic publications.

There is a newly developed interest among the Sri Lankan universities to ascend the webometric ranking on par with the world universities. Several Sri Lankan universities including the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) have already established open access repositories to promote the web visibility of their research output and academic activities. It is important for universities and their scholars to be vigilant on the growth of their web visibility to make certain that their web presence accurately reflects their academic activities. The substantial development of literature on related studies (i. e. Bauer & Backkalbasi, 2005; Notess, 2005; Meho & Yang, 2007, Kousha & Thelwall, 2007; Abdoli & Kousha, 2008) indicates the enthusiasm of researchers at international level. However, there is hardly any published study that investigates the web presence of individual scholars or institutions in Sri Lanka. This paper describes the findings of a study that examined the web presence of the scholarly production of the teaching staff of the OUSL.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is aimed at revealing the current status of web presence of OUSL academics while highlighting the contribution of each academic Faculty and their senior staff towards the web visibility in terms of scholarly publications.

The study aims at achieving the following specific objectives:

- Ascertain the publication rate of the members of teaching staff of OUSL
- Ascertain the rate of citations received by publications
- Ascertain the yearly distributions of publications

Level of web visibility of 260 members of the teaching staff of OUSL was assessed during the study. The population frame was developed based on the academic staff profiles appeared in the Faculty pages of OUSL website at <http://www.ou.ac.lk> during the last week of February 2013.

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Google Scholar (GS) was selected to assess the web presence of the staff members after a preliminary testing session that measured the strength of 3 free tools, namely, GS, Microsoft Academic Search and Elsevier Sirius. GS produced the highest number of hits for the 8 selected OUSL academics. Besides, several researchers such as Notess (2005), Meho & Yang (2007), Kousha & Thelwall (2007), Abdoli & Kousha (2008) had accepted GS as an excellent free tool for scholarly information discovery that is also capable of tracking ‘hidden’ citations and non-traditional forms of publications.

The GS data were harvested during the first 3 weeks of March 2013. During the first phase, names appeared in the staff profiles were used as the search term. During the second phase 2-3 different combinations of names (i.e. first name plus last name, initials plus last name) were used to track the citations of the members whose citations could not be located during the first phase. Use of different names by the same individual and two different authors with the same name were the main difficulties encountered. In order to minimize the error rate, the researcher took several precautions such as personally contacting the relevant member of the staff or re-run the search after adding discipline tag or university tag to the search term. Ultimately, it took nearly 50 hours of work to clarify uncertainties, verify accuracy and relevance of hits and to cleanup the duplicated citations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The level of web visibility of 260 members of teaching staff of OUSL representing the four Faculties– Education (Edu), Engineering (Eng), Humanities and Social Science (HSS), Natural Sciences (NSc) – was assessed in terms of number of publications, number of citations received per publication, and the years of publication. The web presence of senior staff members was calculated separately in order to identify their contribution towards the overall web presence of the University.

Distribution of staff

In all Faculties, except the ‘Edu’, number of senior staff exceeded the number of junior staff. Out of the total number of 260 staff members 56% (145) represented the senior staff category while 44% (115) represented the junior staff category. The Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of staff, Faculty wise.

Scholarly productivity of OUSL teaching staff

A total number of 578 publications were located during the study with the highest number of publications (221) from the ‘NSc’. Table 1 presents the distribution of the publications.

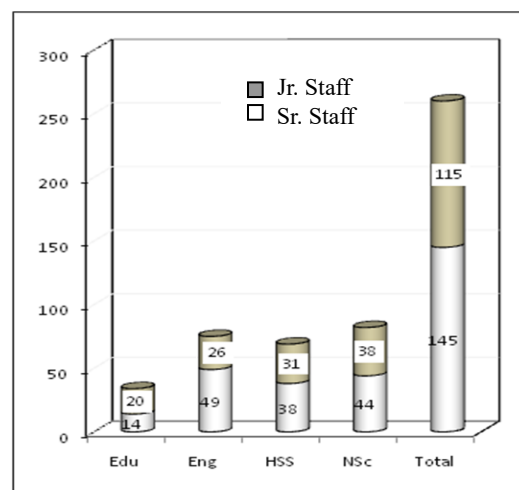


Figure 1 Distribution of staff Faculty wise

Table 1 Distribution of publications Faculty wise

	Edu	Eng	HSS	NSc	Total
No. of publication by all staff	54	174	129	221	578
No. of publication by sr. staff	52 (96%)	157 (90%)	120 (93%)	199 (90%)	528 (91%)

As shown in Table 1, contribution from the senior staff reported 90% or above in all 4 faculties. Another point that highlighted the significance of the senior staff is the number of articles published by individual authors. According to GS data, there were altogether 14 staff members who had published more than 10 publications and all 14 of them were from among senior staff

members. Meanwhile, 18 out of total of 20 staff members who had published 5-10 papers are from senior staff.

However, there were 140 staff members whose presence was not shown in GS and out of them 50 (34%) were from senior staff. In other words, only 120 (46%) members out of 260, had at least one publication, according to the data harvested by GS during the study period. In addition, only 'Eng' reported over 50% of staff with at least 1 paper. Table 2 presents the findings.

Table 2 Staff members with at least one publication

	Edu	%	Eng	%	HSS	%	NSc	%	Total	%
No. of Sr. staff with at least 1 paper	8	57	31	63	24	63	32	73	95	66
No. of Jr. staff with at least 1 paper	2	10	8	31	7	23	8	21	25	22
Total no. of staff with at least 1 paper	10	29	39	52	31	45	40	49	120	46

The publication rate per person was calculated based upon number of members with at least one publication to see the actual impact of the senior staff on the web presence of OUSL. The Figure 2 illustrates the findings.

Publication rate of senior staff is higher than the publication rate of all staff in all four Faculties. The 'Edu' reported the highest publication rate (6.5) by senior staff while the 'Nsc' reported the highest publication rate (5.5) by the total number of staff.

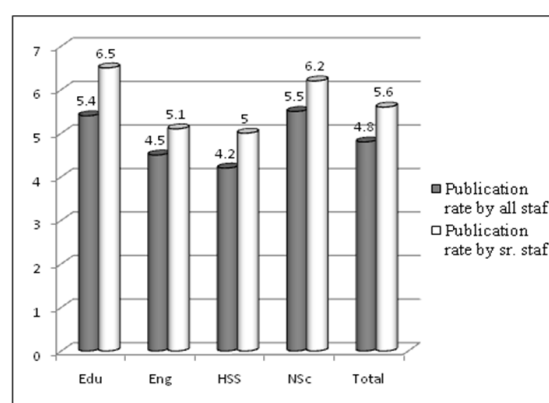


Figure 2 – Publication rate Faculty wise

Citations received by the publications

Number of citations received is considered as a measure of the impact of the cited work. Total number of 2217 citations was reported to be received by the 578 located articles, at the rate of 3.84. Highest rate of citations (5.5) was received by articles published by the 'Nsc' while the lowest rate of citations (4.2) was received by articles published by the 'HSS'. Meanwhile, 69 (12%) publications received more than 10 citations and 52 (9%) publications received 5-10 citations. In this aspect, too, contribution of senior staff was quite significant. Out of the 69 publications that received more than 10 citations, 67 were authored by senior staff members. Further, all 52 papers that received 5-10 citations had also been authored by them.

Yearly distribution of publications

The yearly distribution of publications was observed in 4 groups as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Yearly distributions of publications

	Edu	Eng	HSS	NSc	Total
Before 2000	9	50	30	98	187
2000-2004 (5 yrs)	2	18	20	19	59
2005-2009 (5 yrs)	29	55	43	59	186
2010-2013 Feb (3 yrs 2 months)	14	51	36	45	146
Total	54	174	129	221	578

'Nsc' reported the highest number of publications for the period before 2000. Meanwhile, all the Faculties displayed a significant increase in the number of publications from the time period 2000-2004 to the time period 2005-2009. The growth of the publications seems to be further improving since 2010. Figure 3 illustrates the growth of publications rate from 2000.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study are an eye-opener for the OUSL academic community, particularly, since GS showed no publications for over 50% of the OUSL teaching staff. It is true that GS has its own method of indexing that may cause failure in retrieving certain relevant hits. However, GS's ability to generate results closer to actual has been highlighted frequently in the recent literature. Therefore, it may be sensible to state that the data discussed in the analysis represent the current status of web visibility of OUSL teaching staff up to an acceptable range.

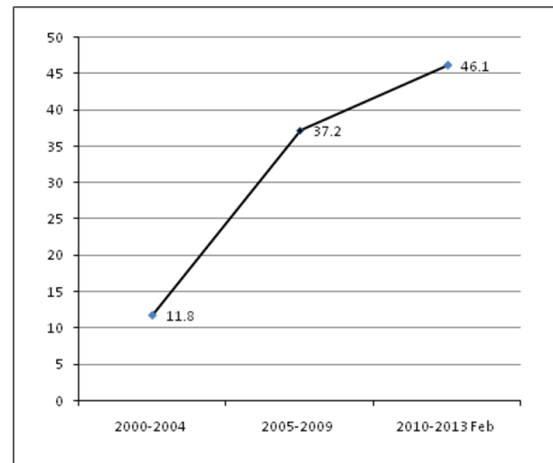


Figure 3 – growth of publications rate since 2000

The findings reveal a significant contribution from the senior staff and indicate certain advancements in the visibility of publications authored by OUSL staff in the recent years. Nevertheless, the fact that many OUSL scholars are not accurately represented in the web cannot be rejected. In other words, a portion of scholarly publications of OUSL academics are not visible through web mainly due to the format (printed only format) or the time of the publication (pre-web era). As a solution to this problem, OUSL Library introduced an open access archive which is in a platform that is readily indexed by GS and other search engines. As a result of these endeavors, during the year 2013 OUSL has shown advancement in its position both in the world ranking as well as in the ranking within the country than in 2012, where the world ranking has arisen from 5882 to 5829 and the country ranking from 8 to 7. However, climbing up the ladder is becoming more and more difficult with more and more competitors joining the contest. The study indicates a situation where the academic staff of the OUSL should divert their attention positively to maximize their web presence for the sake of the institution and to build up the academic status nationally. A study that investigates the patterns of scholarly productivity of OUSL academics will be very helpful to identify the ways of enhancing the publication rate and promoting web visibility of their academic activities.

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