Description

The Declining Art of Good Research

We seem to be compromising our commitment to good research in favor of publishable research, and there are a combination of trends that are accountable for this.

The first is the continued pressure of “publish or perish” for young academics seeking to move forward on the track for fewer and fewer tenured positions (or increasingly draconian renewable contracts).

Secondly, the open access model of research publication has created a booming population of academic journals with pages to fill and new researchers willing to pay article publication fees (APFs).

Thirdly, budget-strapped institutions have been aggressively targeting doctoral research candidates and the higher fees they bring to the table.

When these three trends are combined, the resulting onslaught of quantity over quality leads us to question what “good” research looks like anymore.

Is it the institution from which the research originated, or the debatable rank of the journal that published it?

Good Research as a Methodological Question

When looking to learn how to recognize what “good” research looks like, it makes sense to start at the beginning with the basic scope of the project:

- Does the research have a solid hypothesis?
- Is there evidence of a comprehensive literature review from reputable sources that clearly defines a target area for valuable research?
- Is the research team allocating sufficient time/resources to do the job properly, or were compromises made in order to accommodate the available funding?
- Is there evidence of a willingness to refine the hypothesis and research strategy if needed?
- Are the expectations of the implications of the research realistic?

Characteristics of a Good Research

For conducting a systematic research, it is important understand the characteristics of a good research.

1. Its relevance to existing research conducted by other researchers.
2. A good research is doable and replicable in future.
3. It must be based on a logical rationale and tied to theory.
4. It must generate new questions or hypotheses for incremental work in future.
5. It must directly or indirectly address some real world problem.
6. It must clearly state the variables of the experiment.
7. It must conclude with valid and verifiable findings.

Good Research as an Ethical Question

The question as to whether or not the research is worth conducting at all could generate an extended and heated debate. Researchers are expected to publish, and research budgets are there to be spent.

We can hope that there was some degree of discussion and oversight before the research project was given the green light by a Principal Investigator or Research Supervisor, but those decisions are often made in a context of simple obligation rather than perceived need.

Consider the example of a less than proactive doctoral student with limited time and resources to complete a dissertation topic. A suggestion is made by the departmental Research Supervisor to pick a dissertation from a decade ago and simply repeat it. The suggestion meets the need for expediency and simplicity, but raises as many questions as it answers:

- What is the validity of the study – just because it can be repeated, should it?
- What was the contribution of the original study to the general body of knowledge? Will this additional data be an improvement?
- Given the lack of interest among academic journals in replicated studies, is the suggestion denying the student the opportunity to get published?
- Is directing a student to replication in the interests of expediency meeting a broader academic goal of graduating proficient researchers?

The Building Blocks of “Good” Research

There is no shortage of reputable, peer-reviewed journals that publish first-rate research material for new researchers to model.

That doesn't mean you should copy the research topic or the methodology, but it wouldn't hurt to examine the protocol in detail and make note of the specific decisions made and criteria put in place when that protocol was developed and implemented.

The challenge lies in sticking to those tried-and-true methodologies when your research data doesn't prove to be as rich and fruitful as you had hoped.

Have you ever been stuck while in the middle of conducting a research? How did you cope with that? Let us know your approach while conducting a good research in the comments section below!

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