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Waning Impacts of Research on the Society: An Inconvenient Truth

Babatunde Joseph Oso^{1*}

¹Biochemistry Unit, Department of Chemical Sciences, Kings University, Ode Omu, Nigeria.

Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The spirit of careerism and competition among researchers has lessened the impact of academic research on society creating a halt that abates the unification of academic and professional service. If academic research will address some of the public problems, there must be a shift in the paradigm. The new paradigm should be a type that underscores increase in knowledge with the goal of promoting partnership between the society and research.

Keywords: Society; research; impact; careerism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Numerous innovations and technology have been developed through the studies conducted in academics in the past most especially in the developed countries. The impact of applied research on society has been felt in every aspect of life ranging from agriculture, culture, food safety, health and maintenance/sustenance of

nature resources by increasing the store of knowledge and devising new applications. The impact of basic research on the society, on the other hand, is less despite the increase in knowledge and technological advancement [1,2]. Besides, there is no direct connection between the quality of a basic scientific research and its impact on the society [2]. Ideally, the purpose of research is to achieve academic impact by

*Corresponding author: E-mail: basjoe08@gmail.com;

advancing the discipline and influencing the society; and obviously, no researcher is interested in doing passive research that has no influence on anyone in academia or society, but the inconvenient truth is that majority of the research are content to be 'shelf-sitting' works with would-be outcomes that remain probable and never taken up by others. Though, research has the potential to address some of the most important problems in the society, but the shaky foundation on which the enterprise stands has handicapped the impact interface and streamlined the current interest to careerism and competition; thus, creating a gap that weakens the integration of academic and professional service.

It is not a hidden fact that most researchers engage in basic research in the spirit of careerism energized by these three hallmarks: 'publish or perish' impressionism, positive result bias and neophilia. These had created ever-heightening hurdle that scientist need to jump in order to drive their research forward [3]. While these hallmarks brings attention to the researchers and their institutions it could also encourage a research that is highly cited and be good for the academic discipline but have no significant impact on the society [4].

'Publish or perish' impressionism has without a doubt stimulated a competitive environments among the researchers with singular task of publishing paper to win and paying little or no attention on how the work-done has influenced other researchers or the society [5]. Furthermore, this has stimulated the value of a research work to be based on volumes and where the paper is published and not what is in the paper. This impression has exacerbated the temptation of engaging in flawed research that is too far from discovering the truth and even validation [5,6]. In the same way, quest for acceptance of a research work has prompted failure to report failures in research and intensified the inducement to disregard inappropriate data which is termed 'file drawer problem' [7]. This is being 'positive bias' as many results that fail to confirm the objectives of the study are dumped on shelves and the focus is on their positive outcomes [8]. This behaviour is probably created by the need to drive up research through high publication output with a high citation rate as papers that report 'negative results' are less likely to be published and cited [3,9]. This attitude wilts scientific knowledge as many flawed

findings might be repeated by other researchers which can lead to waste of time and resources.

Furthermore, a rather detrimental but appealing syndrome in academic community is the quest to search for new. It is appealing in the sense that it promotes novelty among researchers but detrimental in the sense that without substantiation, suspicious findings remain and may mislead. While this has advanced researchers' 'interest' in terms of competition for job placement and promotion over the decades, it has promoted little or no interest in the researchers' careers in term of external impact and encouraged shoddy findings that are too far from having any impact on the society.

If academic research will address some of the societal problems, the value system must change. Methods for evaluating the impact of basic research must be developed and it must be such that promote trust both within and without and encourage research beyond obligation to win job and promotion. There should be a call for reciprocal interaction between the academia and the public to accentuate the societal challenges and ways academic contributions can be harnessed for development and economic advances. Researchers should be encouraged to report failures as knowing the false is as important as knowing the fact. All data should be published no matter what the outcome is provided there is a hypothesis to explain the findings [3]. Moreover, verification of findings should be welcomed among researchers as this will help in establishing the soundness of findings and improving one another's performance.

2. CONCLUSION

Research awareness in bridging civil society and academic environment should be created to increase knowledge and understanding and more importantly, to promote partnership between the society and research.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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