

QUANTITY vs QUALITY

In the world of science and technology, the existence of different systems of measurement and indexation of publications has led to a marked preponderance of the qualitative aspects of scientific production, over those of a quantitative nature. Such is the case of the requirements for hiring and promoting academic personnel in universities and research institutions, or for the approval of funds for research projects, as well as for the mechanism that, starting with the Mexican experience of the National System of Researchers, has become a form of low salary compensation more and more utilized in our region: the programs or systems of promotion of researchers.

The essence of the matter is the difficulty in establishing scales and values of quality of the publications in the short term, before the recognition and the utilization of the generated knowledge can turn evident the soundness and validity of the findings of the researchers. Not only is it difficult to evaluate the scientific production, but there are other factors of importance, such as the quality and effectiveness of teaching and training.

The most widely used and acknowledge measure, the impact factor (IF) determined by the Journal Citation Reports, certainly evaluates the echo that a given published paper or a publication has among colleagues in the more dynamic English speaking societies. The IF sets the mark of a journal or of the authors in the so-called 'mainstream' of science. But, what happens with those who defend the validity of publishing in other languages or of dealing with problems that matter to an audience that is far off from that stream? Does it make sense to investigate problems whose nature and interest are local?

Journals such as *Interciencia* seem to be condemned to a low IF, for many reasons. The language of publication of the vast majority of the papers, which does not depend upon its Editorial Committee but stems from the free will of those who submit papers, is Spanish, followed by Portuguese. The

number of papers published in English does not reach 20%. Additionally, the fact that the majority of our researchers prefer to cite papers from the mainstream, rather than those published in local journals, becomes a very significant factor.

Being since its beginnings a multi-disciplinary journal and the dissemination organ of an association that gathers the scientific communities of the Americas, the most influential elements that determine the acceptance of a manuscript in *Interciencia* are its pertinence for the development of our region and its quality as evaluated by peers. The field of knowledge to which it belongs or the language in which it is written are not determinant.

Those journals that serve a specific community practicing a given discipline have a better option to reach a higher IF than the few multi-disciplinary journals that exist, as they have an audience made up of specialists. Of course, exception must be made of the main journals, the giants of scientific publication, which being multi-disciplinary have set the pace of the mainstream even before counting started.

Unfortunately, there are many institutions that center the concept of quality exclusively on the IF. In so doing, they set aside the responsibility of looking for the highest possible quality levels, even though these are hard to determine and of pursuing that the research carried out be of the largest possible pertinence for the progress and wellbeing of the society of their countries.

Sadly, the reach of science and technology is markedly diminished by the linguistic barriers, mainly for our students, to whom the widest possible transfer of knowledge should be insured. Science is nowadays a part of the culture of the people. Is not the language a part of that culture as well?

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