

Iranian science shows world's fastest growth: ranks 17th in science production in 2012

The Islamic Republic of Iran ranked 17th in terms of science production in the world in 2012, according to the latest statistics released by the Scopus database.

According to the statistics, Iran produced 34,155 articles in 2012, which gained the country the world's 17th rank in science production and fixed its top position in the region, above Turkey. Scientific progress over the past few years was the result of the country's recent policies and programs to develop knowledge and facilitate researchers' access to the world's top academic resources. Iran has the world's fastest-growing scientific output, measured by the number of peer-reviewed papers published in international journals. In addition, Iran ranked first in scientific growth in the world in 2011. In 2000, the Islamic Republic of Iran ranked 53rd in the world in terms of highly cited medical articles, but improved to the 23rd rank in 2011. According to the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI), Iranian researchers and scientists published a total of 60,979 scientific articles in major international journals from 1999 to 2008. It is being said that scientific growth in Iran has been fastest in the world, even more than China. Whatever the reason, it is commendable that the country has achieved this even at the worst possible sanctions from the most powerful and most influential country in the world. Iran with a science and technology yearly growth rate of 25% is doubling its total output every three years and at this rate will reach the level of Canadian annual output in 2017. "If Iran keeps moving with the present momentum, it can ascend to the 4th place from the current 17th (in the world ranking of scientific growth and scientific production) in the next 6 years.

How about quality and impact? The USA still has a clear lead; taking as a measure of world impact the share of the most highly cited papers (taken as the top 1% in each discipline) puts the USA in the lead with 61%, while the UK outperforms its volume share with 13% of highly cited papers. Iran still underperforms on this measure but the gap is closing, and is likely to close further as citation counts are a lagging indicator – it takes some years for spending on science to translate, first into publication outputs, and only later into citations of those papers by other scientists.

Under Iran's 'comprehensive plan for science', the country plans to be spending four per cent of GDP on research and development by 2030. Unfortunately, heavy sanctions against Iran and financial crisis over the last two years slowed down this scientific growth. Now Iranian scientific society hopes to next president to fasten this growth and again back to future.

Shahin Akhondzadeh, Ph.D.

Editor in Chief