

Beyond the h-index: Unveiling nuances and demanding rigor in academic metrics

Dear Editor,

We recently engaged with the editorial titled “The h-index: Understanding its predictors, significance, and criticism.”^[1] We appreciate the authors’ endeavor to delve into the intricacies of the h-index and its application in assessing academic researchers. The comprehensive overview provided in the editorial serves as a valuable resource for both novice and seasoned scholars alike, shedding light on the nuances of this widely employed metric. However, we would like to offer a more critical analysis, emphasizing both positive aspects and areas that warrant further discussion.

Creditable Highlights of the Editorial

- I. Didactic Explanation of Calculation Method: The editorial provides a clear and didactic explanation of the h-index calculation method, ensuring accessibility for readers of varying familiarity with bibliometric metrics. The inclusion of a step-by-step guide in the editorial is particularly commendable, aiding comprehension and practical application.
- II. Comprehensive Examination of Databases: The detailed exploration of diverse databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, ResearchGate, and Vidwan, offers valuable insights into the varied platforms available for h-index calculation. Figures and tables enhance the clarity of information, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the sources at the researchers’ disposal.
- III. Recognition of Database Discrepancies: The acknowledgment of potential disparities in h-index values across different databases due to factors such as coverage, time lag, and data quality is a crucial aspect of the editorial. This recognition prompts researchers to approach their h-index interpretation with a discerning awareness of these database-specific nuances.

Aspects Necessitating Deeper Discourse

- i. Manipulation Risks and Ethical Considerations: While the editorial briefly touches on the potential manipulation of h-index through self-citations, a more in-depth exploration of strategies to detect and prevent such manipulation, along with a discussion on the ethical implications, would significantly enhance the editorial’s robustness.^[2]

- ii. Disciplinary Variances and Impact on Comparisons: The editorial acknowledges the challenge of comparing researchers across different disciplines but falls short of a thorough examination of how disciplinary differences might influence h-index interpretation. Delving into the impact of disciplinary norms, citation practices, and publication patterns would provide a more comprehensive view.^[3]
- iii. Insufficient Exploration of Complementary Metrics: While other metrics such as the i10-index, g-index, and m-index are briefly mentioned, a more explicit discussion on how these metrics complement the h-index and contribute to a holistic assessment of a researcher’s impact would add depth to the analysis.^[4]
- iv. Addressing Potential Biases in Database Inclusion: The editorial could benefit from a more critical examination of the inclusion criteria for databases. Discussing biases arising from the selection of databases and potential consequences on h-index values would contribute to a more thorough understanding of the metric’s limitations.^[5]
- v. The Need for Standardization and Best Practices: A discussion on the lack of standardization in h-index calculation across databases and the potential benefits of establishing best practices in its application would add a valuable layer of critique to the editorial.^[3]

We appreciate the editorial as it provides valuable insights into the h-index. Discussion on these critical points would elevate its scientific rigor and contribute to a more nuanced discussion within the academic community. Thank you for your commitment to fostering insightful discussions, and we look forward to reading more thought-provoking content in future issues.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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