

GETTING STARTED ON RESEARCH IN YOUR UNDERGRAD YEARS

The research sector is one of the most neglected sectors in our country, despite its growing need for effective policy making. While university-level research-based projects related to the social sciences should have been given the utmost priority in the education policy, most of the public universities do not offer their students even the minimum facilities for conducting researches. The gap gets filled instead with mandatory course requirements like internships and comprehensive exams.

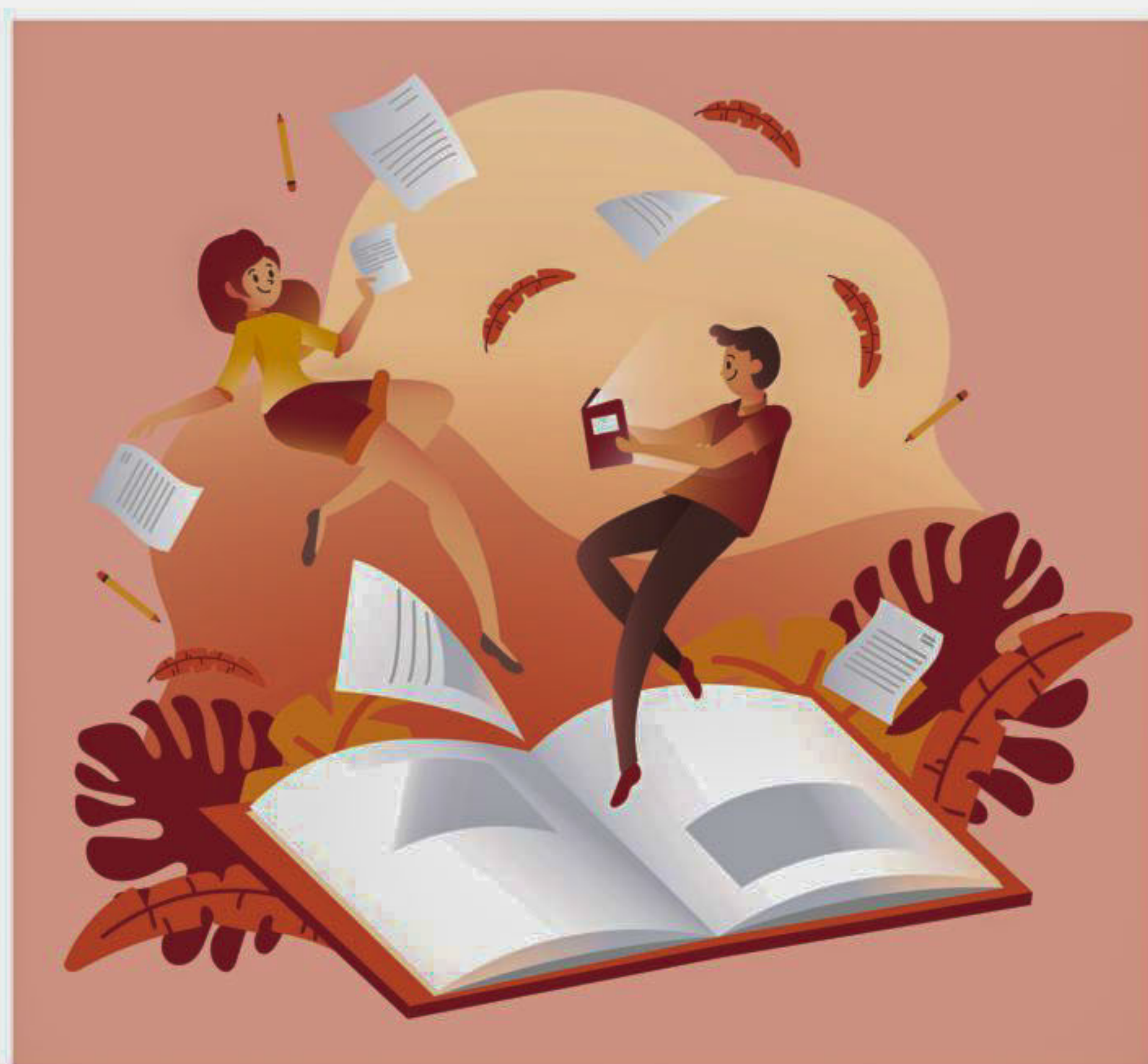
Lack of research-based projects in university is a major setback for those who want to develop their careers in academia. Many try to find their own way of getting started, but there are huge obstacles on that path. The fault lies, primarily in our curriculum. Yasin Shafi Khan, a Lecturer of Development Studies in Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP) says, "Research is basically producing or exploring knowledge, hence it allows students to find gratification and motivates them to pursue further knowledge-generation. When they are not exposed to the world of research they are more likely to go for the safer option i.e. civil service. From my experience as a university student and later as a university lecturer, I have found that students are taught research methodology courses way later in their academic programme." Even though starting on your own might be a bit hazardous, it is not at all impossible if you at least plan your way towards it. Some simple hacks could actually ensure your progress as the time passes. Yasin Shafi Khan talked about some hacks that could actually get you started in an efficient way.

STARTING TO STUDY ON YOUR OWN

As most universities do not offer full-fledged research methodology courses, it's better to start on your own. There are plenty of resources or materials that can be found online to respond to your needs. Journal articles can help you get exposed to the process of academic writing in a more efficient way than you can imagine. This will also help you get a clear idea regarding the different steps of conducting a research.

DATA COLLECTIONS AND SURVEYS

Once you have a primary idea about the procedures, start working as an enumerator and data collector for different research projects. Often research



firms look for enumerators for their projects, where they provide training for them as well. This can actually be a good internship experience, as it will expose you towards practical approaches of data collection and give you an idea about how this works in real life. This will certainly add to your experience when you start your own thesis.

DEVELOPING CERTAIN SOFTWARE SKILLS

Your expertise in quantitative analysis would depend on your skills in statistical softwares like Stata and R. A good command in Excel can also make your work easier for you, when it comes to

representing data in terms of the research topic. It is important that you are comfortable using the software for your work, as it can come to great use in qualitative analysis as well.

WORKING WITH THE TEACHERS

Look forward to working with some of your teachers who share the same research interests as you, if possible. These teachers most often work in a lot of funded projects, and collaborating with them on these projects can actually help you learn the most.

PARTICIPATING IN PAPER PRESENTATION COMPETITIONS

Tanjim-Ul Islam, a third year student of Economics in the University of Dhaka, shares the experience of how he got started with research, "Halfway during my first semester in the university, I took an attempt to write my first paper for a conference. I was not selected, but I found the process enjoyable. Then, I tried to make it into Team Bangladesh for the 14th South Asian Economics Students' Meet and somehow got in. I would not say that the paper was that great, but it was a start. The experience of writing a paper matters. That is why the experience of attending competitions to present my papers has been crucial for me."

These competitions are mostly arranged by different universities and research firms and the papers are judged by distinguished members of the research arena. Participating in these competitions will give you the opportunity to get your papers evaluated. You will also get exposed to the papers prepared by budding researchers, and this will drive you to improve your methodology to a great extent.

Starting early can actually help you develop your career in this arena after you graduate. Nahian Bin Khaled, who is currently working as a research assistant in International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) says, "My prior experiences gave me a clear understanding of my work, and helped me focus on important issues. Now when I work on social inclusion projects, I kind of know the statistical facts behind it. The big data files don't scare me much, mainly because I started early in my university days."

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FUNDRAISING FOR COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Most of you will be involved with fundraising at some point in your lives for reasons beyond community service projects. Asking for fund surely has to be persuasive but the emotional factor needs to be dominant in your words, expressions and actions. Donors contribute voluntarily to a cause when they feel deeply attached to it. Presumably, you have your budget and action-plan set with a definite goal in mind for the project, hence for this article I'll concentrate on some basics as to how you can approach a donor/philanthropist who's likely to donate to your cause.

The first thing you need to do is be transparent about every transaction. The proposal letter, stating the project details, its modus operandi, the problems it addresses, the impact it will create and the common goal it shares with the donor, needs to be transparent. Your proposal should reflect each aspect of your project in a way which gives the donor a sense of reliability. Hence, choosing donors is very important. If your cause doesn't align with theirs, the likelihood of them sponsoring your project is next to none. Supposedly if it's a project about campaigning for saving nature and you're approaching a company who's responsible for producing plastic, it really doesn't work out.

Secondly, focus on making an appointment with the involved authorities of the organisation through a professional email or by directly approaching the organisation. Having personal contacts comes in handy at such times because they are more likely to prioritise you. Fundraising is a difficult job. Having worked in this sector for the last 20 years, Rueben Mayes said, "The reality is that there are thousands of reasons why people may or may not give you money. You have absolutely no control over that."



What most people do is overthink about it and get disappointed about the outcome. Even if you approach 19 companies for fundraising and none of them agrees to give you money, maybe the 20th will be your lucky draw. Instead of thinking that the previous 19 companies were wasteful ventures, try to get information from them that you can use to strategise your next move. Start reflecting as to how you could have done a better job.

While in the meeting, you should maintain sheer commitment to your project, show measurable

outcomes/impacts and instead of roaming in circles, ask for a specific amount. Don't forget to give recognition and thank them on a continuous basis for it. It will increase your fundraising chances by folds. Finally, believe in yourself and never lose hope. Good luck.

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Making a DIFFERENCE

Bangladesh is rapidly moving towards middle income status by 2021. Our businesses definitely offer immense opportunities for the growing economy and this diversity needs a stage for the stories untold. See Bangladesh make its mark on the global map as Making a Difference brings you our proudest success stories from across the country.

FIVE BIG FUNDRAISING MISTAKES TO AVOID

1

POOR COMMUNICATION WITH DONORS

Stay in touch with current donors even when you don't need their money. Update them periodically about your project status. Always express gratitude towards new donors to make them feel like agents of change.

3

FAILURE TO MEASURE IMPACT

Construct and apply metrics to measure impact in a way that is suitable for all stakeholders. The impact of a project largely relies on the partnership strength and it needs to be measured adequately.

5

NOT FOCUSING ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Fundraising can often be synonymous with "friend-raising", which means that focus needs to be given on building meaningful relationships with the donors. Only focusing on the monetary aspect is one of the biggest mistakes made.

2

NOT SHARING ENOUGH RESULTS

Fundraising goes beyond asking for money by showing the donors all the great things that can be done with the money. The need for funds and how meeting that need will drive change should be vividly shared with the donors.

4

NOT SHOWING VALUE TO DONORS

Fundraising shouldn't embody a top-down relationship where the donors are treated like they're doing a favour. Instead, the relationship should be that of a partnership where each party is deriving value from the arrangement.