



VISUAL: STAR

Why students are unsatisfied with our higher education

Dr Syed Saad Andaleeb is distinguished professor emeritus at Pennsylvania State University in the US, former vice-chancellor of Brac University, and vice chair at the Foundation for Learning, Teaching and Research.

Nabeel Iqbal is lecturer at the Department of Economics of the School of Business and Economics at North South University (NSU).

SYED SAAD ANDALEEB and NABEEL IQBAL

In response to increased competition, both local and global, universities are allocating more resources to monitor and improve student satisfaction in order to attract and retain them. These practices are picking up pace across the globe. In fact, in Bangladesh, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has directed universities to set up an Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) to ensure quality education – an important determinant of student satisfaction. If the higher education institutions (HEIs) in Bangladesh are to successfully survive and thrive in the face of ever-increasing local and international competition, they need to be on par with the changing philosophies and practices in the higher education market. One of these key changes – led by top-tier international universities – would be increased sensitivity to student needs and expectations.

On August 19, *The Daily Star* reported that the number of Bangladeshi students seeking higher education abroad had tripled despite a significant increase in the number of local universities. In 2021, the Universal College Bangladesh introduced pathway programmes to Monash University. And in May, the University College Sedaya International (UCSI), a Malaysian university, started its operations in Bangladesh. The problem of talented students leaving for higher education abroad will only be exacerbated if Bangladeshi universities fail to recognise comprehensive student needs – reflected in student satisfaction data – in this age of globalised competition in the higher education market.

Student satisfaction can be conceptualised as meeting and exceeding student expectations with respect to their educational experience and the services and facilities provided by the educational institutions. Student satisfaction with teachers and institutions indicates the extent to which students feel content, engaged, and rewarded with the educational experience as well as with administrative service and opportunities for extracurricular activities. It is a dynamic phenomenon that is continually shaped and reshaped by students' experiences at their respective institutions. Student satisfaction is affected by various factors, both macro and micro, ranging from the university's image or reputation to the quality of classroom interactions and the teacher-student relationships.

Universities endeavouring to monitor and deliver student satisfaction is a positive sum game for both the pupils and the respective institutions. The rewards of meeting and exceeding students' expectations for HEIs are many: student satisfaction can positively impact student recruitment, motivation, academic performance,

retention, fundraising, the quality of services in educational institutions, and boost university image and reputation. Student dissatisfaction, on the other hand, can negatively impact educational institutions through the increased likelihood of students quitting, transferring to other institutions, and from negative word of mouth. Therefore, the definitive answer to the question of "Does student satisfaction matter?" is an emphatic "Yes."

If educational institutions are to effectively address student satisfaction, a holistic approach and concerted efforts are required from all quarters of the institution. Additionally, the institutions need to be aware of the fact that there is no one-size-fits all model; what works for one department or geography may not work for another. However, the first steps, arguably, are to recognise that education is a service; the reputation and image of an educational institution are

classroom experiences below their expectations on the above criteria? Are teachers failing our students by not effectively addressing how they learn? Why do students feel and state (quoted from an earlier op-ed), "I don't know why I was present in the class; boredom was at its peak; the teacher was not prepared for the class... many teachers are toppers of their batches, but they cannot teach. After the first week of classes, many students are lost in a black hole."

But placing the burden on teachers alone to improve education would be wrong. We must also ask: are academic administrators guiding teachers to play a transformative role? Are they allocating the valuable resources at their disposal effectively and efficiently? And what role are our regulatory and higher bodies playing in making higher education a place from which satisfied and equipped students emerge with knowledge and skills ready to be put to use?

Research on student satisfaction can stimulate and guide future research as well as informed policymaking, especially in relation to faculty recruitment and training. As more data is accumulated in the universities in Bangladesh, it is imperative that educational institutions turn to the use of student satisfaction

significantly connected to the quality of this service where the voice of students is a critical input for institutional improvement processes.

One of our studies, based on student survey data from public and private universities in Bangladesh, identified several important correlates of student satisfaction at the micro-classroom level. While the factors identified in the study are not exhaustive, they are indicative: students want teachers to be able to explain concepts clearly, be up-to-date on content, inspire students, make the course interesting, use effective teaching methods creatively, and demonstrate their competence in teaching. These qualities of teachers are all strongly associated with students' satisfaction with teaching. Student satisfaction with the courses taught are also similarly associated. In fact, satisfaction with teaching and satisfaction with courses were the most highly associated, suggesting that teachers versed in good teaching practices also design and offer courses that are highly satisfying.

These basic facts are generally known, and our study corroborates this knowledge. However, the question that must be raised is: why do students, in general, find their

data to guide decision-making and resource allocation. We believe this view will contribute towards a paradigm shift: data-driven policymaking and strategising vis-à-vis enhancing service quality and student satisfaction in HEIs in Bangladesh.

Like the top-tier universities in developed countries, HEIs in Bangladesh also need to efficiently allocate resources by monitoring service delivery and meeting student needs and expectations. With an educational landscape that is evolving and changing rapidly, universities in various regions of the world are becoming more sensitive and responsive to the needs and expectations of students. The institutions and countries that adapt quickly to this changing landscape will be able to reap rich dividends in terms of increased student intake, retention, educational outcomes, and sustainability. Bangladesh must compete with emerging players in the international higher education market to retain its student body, as well as attract international students. A crucial factor in this regard will be the efficient allocation of resources, guided by evidence-based research – in which student satisfaction ought to play a much larger role.

Fly me to the Moon



BLOWN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

"Hey, who will harvest potatoes for my *kachchi biriyani* in space now?" a colleague of mine commented alongside a Facebook meme on *The Martian*. The primary source of his joke was the removal of the civil servant with an agriculture background from the chairmanship of SPARRSO, Bangladesh's space research organisation. The secondary source of his joke lies in the sci-fi film featuring a stranded astronaut who survives on Mars by growing potatoes using his own faeces as manure. But it was no joke that on August 24, a team of Indian scientists successfully sent Chandrayaan-3 to put a lander called Vikram (courage) and a rover called Pragyaan (wisdom) on the dark side of the Moon.

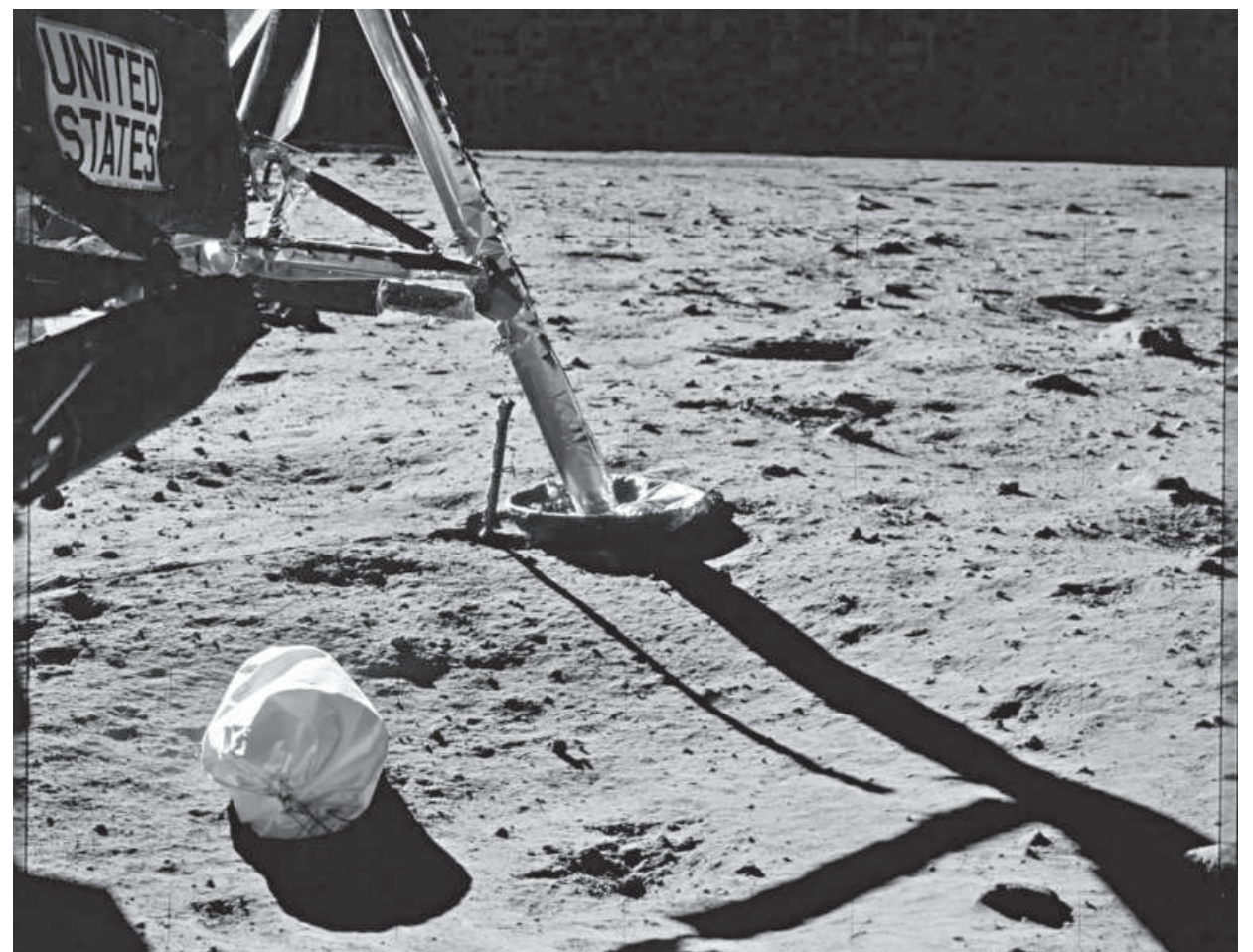
As a country where so many holidays are "subject to the sighting of the Moon," we have curiously followed our neighbour's brave lunar endeavour. The rover has

misplaced its priorities. The West has always regarded, in the words of the TV series *Star Trek*, space as the final frontier of their Enterprise. Between 1966 and 1976, the US and Russia conducted 19 of the total 21 lunar landings.

China accomplished its first lunar landing in 2013 after a 37-year hiatus, and outlined plans to dispatch humans to the Moon by the end of this decade. Now that India has joined this much-touted "Rising Asia" competition, the frontier tussle is gaining new currency. Nestled between these two rising superpowers, we ponder what the old lady on the Moon has been spinning for us! Given the tidal ebb and flow of a riverine country intricately linked to our climatic fate, one would presume that Bangladesh has an equal stake to the Moon. After all, we, too, grew up with the space ventures of Premendra Mitra's Ghonada or

started his career at the Pakistan Atomic Energy Centre before moving to the Atomic Energy Centre in Dhaka. His successor, Faruq Aziz Khan, had a PhD from Canada and conducted research in nuclear physics in the USAEC laboratories. Then we had AA Ziauddin Ahmed, who worked in high energy physics at Imperial College London. After that, we had Dr AM Choudhury, who is famous for the development of the Rose Petal Theory for the forecast of cyclone tracks on the Bangladesh coastline. Sadly, only one of the past 15 chairpersons of SPARRSO held a PhD degree. And we had a rude awakening: we are running our space programme with bureaucrats just like any other government administrative branch.

What does it tell us about a country that aspires to become smart and ready for the IT-driven Fourth Industrial Revolution? Lack of clear vision hampers our space mission. The agency lacks a satellite launch facility, an orbit, and pertinent technology. It was even excluded from the launch of the Bangabandhu-1 Satellite – a US-based private company with French assistance oversaw the mission. One accessory that justifies the name SPARRSO is a ground station, which is also funded by foreign grants. There have been repeated media reports citing the fact that the agency lacks the personnel



A jettison bag beneath the Apollo 11 lunar module in 1969.

FILE PHOTO: NASA

already begun transmitting images from the surface of the Moon, providing valuable information for scientific research that will help better understand the Moon's geology, history and resources. One such image involves sacks of faeces left on the Moon's surface. It was not a pretty sight for our Earthly satellite, which is scandalised for its scars in local folklore. India deserves praise for dispelling many such superstitions and promoting Pragyaan with courage. However, a section of the Western media remains unimpressed by India's space exploration, which now involves a second expedition to the Sun. The media highlighted the lack of access to toilets in India, where hundreds of millions of people still defecate in the open, implying that the South Asian country has

Satyajit Ray's Professor Shonku. After India's lunar landing, it was no surprise that everyone's attention turned to our space research.

A largely ignored government-sponsored research organisation specialising in remote sensing and computer modelling, Bangladesh Space Research and Remote Sensing Organisation (SPARRSO) suddenly came under unwanted attention. The portfolio of the bureaucrat who held the chairmanship of SPARRSO is no different from that of those who follow established rules, procedures and regulations to operate within the system. I scanned the list of previous SPARRSO chairpersons. Since its inception in 1980, there have been 26 people. The first 10 chairs all had PhDs, and a number of them are famed physicians. The founding chair, Dr Anwar Hossain,

and funds necessary to operate a sophisticated space programme. In 2022, only 23 scientists out of 63 positions for officers and engineers were filled at SPARRSO.

If we truly want to harvest our dream of becoming smart global stakeholders, we must invest more in research and innovation. We must promote science and technology. We must abandon the mindset that joining the service sectors as civil, military or corporate administrators is the only career destination. Certain specialised areas should be left to the professionals. These field experts must be protected from bureaucrats who believe they can manage everything, including politicians. For our space dream to flourish, we must first create space for our specialists to prosper and develop.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

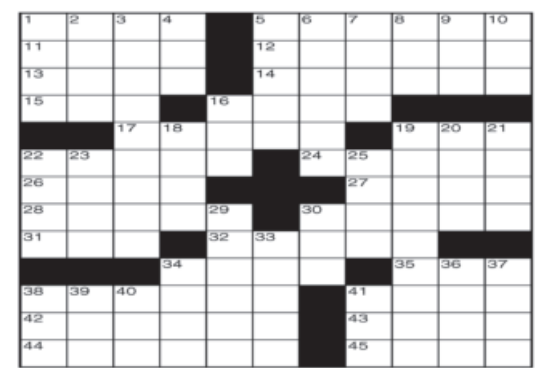
ACROSS

- 1 Years gone by
- 5 Act restless
- 11 High point
- 12 Singer Grande
- 13 Pivotal point
- 14 Snappy retort
- 15 Beer dispenser
- 16 Suit piece
- 17 Move smoothly
- 19 Carpenter's tool
- 22 Roberts of film
- 24 Following
- 26 The Emerald Isle
- 27 Diamond scores
- 28 Dance's de Mille
- 30 Thesaurus author
- 31 Not pos.
- 32 Skimpy

DOWN

- 1 Prepare for a trip
- 2 Farm chunk
- 3 Gun-running, e.g.
- 4 Cowboy nickname
- 5 Disconcerted
- 6 Van Gogh work
- 7 Force
- 8 Bit of humor

- 9 Hydrocarbon suffix
- 10 Black goo
- 16 Through
- 18 Script bit
- 19 Getting cuddly
- 20 Skin woe
- 21 Sunset site
- 22 Writer Cocteau
- 23 Goad on
- 25 Steel ingredient
- 29 Plaster finish
- 30 Singer Stewart
- 33 Hardly a fan
- 34 Throw in the towel
- 36 Fan's favorite
- 37 Refuse
- 38 Jackson 5 hit
- 39 Big snake
- 40 Dentist's deg.
- 41 Letter after sigma



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.