

How to build a conducive environment for INNOVATION AND RESEARCH

Lack of funding and resources creates a host of different issues. Starting from limited exposure to research to sometimes spending your entire undergraduate years without ever dabbling in it, the grim reality is that our nation still has a long way to go before ensuring an environment where researchers can thrive.

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In Bangladesh, academia is often one of the most overlooked aspects that has the potential to greatly contribute to the country's sustainable development. With the rise in the conversation of the causes of 'brain drain', it stands as a critically important point to talk about research and innovation alongside the many limitations to creating innovative new changes that hold us back. Moving forward, in order to create an environment conducive to these fields, it is crucial to address the many problems and the many ways we can tackle them.

Where does this problem start? Conducting research in Bangladesh is something students are usually exposed to in their undergraduate years, where many have the opportunity to work on a capstone 'thesis' project—conducting research on a particular project in their specific field of interest. The issue with this, however, is multidimensional. One of the biggest problems here is how many hurdles stand in front of you while you're attempting to carry out research work at an undergraduate level. Funding is a consistent issue, often resulting in university students not being able to spend enough time being exposed to the world of research. And while a master's degree or a PhD is available, what they offer can often seem lacklustre or insufficient. The biggest reason here is, of course, a lack of funding.

Mahir Amer, a student completing his Master's of Biological Sciences at the University of Edinburgh, raises this point, stating, "Anyone majoring in chemistry or the biological sciences will know that the reagents and chemicals we use on a daily basis are costly. The equipment we use also costs quite a lot. As a developing nation, the cold hard truth is that we can't invest as much into Research and Development as other countries." He further added, "The



reason I chose the University of Edinburgh is because they have enough funding and resources to carry out cutting-edge research. They also hold lab meetings, section meetings, seminars, and a host of other activities on a frequent basis—which is something not often seen in our country."

This lack of funding and resources creates a host of different issues. Starting from limited exposure to research to sometimes spending your entire undergraduate years without ever dabbling in it, the grim reality is that our nation still has a long way to go before ensuring an environment where researchers can thrive. There is no singular solution to this, but it is important to recognise that government-backed funding—and even funding from external sources—will be crucial going forward. A greater emphasis must, thus, be placed on the necessity of it in our Research and Development sector.

Muhammad Ihsan-Ul-Karim, a Lecturer at the Institute of Health Economics at the

delves into how a particular topic was discovered, the thought process behind it, what alternative ways could this problem be approached in, and its significance in our society, then we could pave the road for students to think more 'scientifically'."

Another aspect here is that while research can sometimes be expensive, that is frequently not the only thing holding us back. It is extremely crucial to understand that for research to thrive, the collaboration between individual researchers as well as amongst researchers and those who work in policy-making fields is of utmost importance.

Dr Ishrat Jabeen, Associate Professor at the Department of Biochemistry and Microbiology at North South University, says, "There is a need for direct involvement of scientists and innovators in properly addressing and framing their problems in order to receive proper support and to eventually aid in the formation of legitimate policies. This in turn will ensure a diversity of research perspectives and

- » Bangladesh's research and innovation sector faces critical challenges, including lack of funding, limited infrastructure, and insufficient exposure for students.
- » The absence of collaboration, professional jealousy, and inadequate research culture hinder knowledge-sharing and stifle academic growth.
- » Policy gaps, undervaluing of impactful research, and motivation driven by career promotions rather than knowledge creation weaken research output.
- » Solutions include government-backed funding, improved researcher training, industry-academia partnerships, and integrating scientific thinking into curricula.
- » Building a collaborative, well-funded, and intellectually driven environment is essential for fostering sustainable research and innovation in Bangladesh.

PHOTO:
ORCHID CHANGMA

University of Dhaka, suggests possible solutions, "Research infrastructure needs to be developed as required. For this, the government can provide conditional scholarship opportunities for students to obtain research-related skills from abroad, the condition being that they return to the country afterwards. Most importantly, salary structure with those having foreign PhD or equivalent degrees needs to be restructured, so that remuneration is comparable to that of our neighbouring countries at least. Otherwise, we're looking at more and more researchers leaving the country, leading to brain drain."

One tangential point to all of this is the need for university courses to promote scientific thinking alongside the learning of mere facts and knowledge. Ahnaf Yeanat Tazwar, a third-year student at North South University, says, "If a proactive approach was adopted where the coursework also

allow the presence of a broader discussion with citizens and stakeholders."

The lack of broad-scale discussions among researchers is, thus, one big hurdle that makes research more inaccessible than it needs to be. This problem, however, is often exacerbated by an absence of a collaborative spirit in a professional environment. Mahir Amer says, "I didn't know professional jealousy could get in the way of things this much until I tried to conduct research back home. I reckon most researchers keep hush-hush because they're afraid of getting stabbed in the back. However, this creates a very dry environment where researchers rarely host lab meetings, seminars, or even share ideas with others. As a result, undergraduate students are not properly exposed to the research work their faculty members are doing."

Dr Ishrat Jabeen raises a similar point,

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