

How to build a conducive environment for innovation and research

If research is merely motivated by instantaneous profit, then attempting long-term changes will pose a big challenge. The bottom line here is that the problems are at our very foundations, and responding to them requires laying the groundwork for the future. Be it in humanities or STEM-related fields, these problems are nearly ubiquitous.

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stating, “Apart from funding, the other aspects that hold us back are a lack of expertise, training, and a lack of research collaboration without personal incentives. Furthermore, underrepresentation in political institutions often gives people a feeling of inefficacy. At a policy level, our demands should be reasonably expected to be heard. The fact that it is not is a problem.”

The policy aspect of this problem is not very easily defined. In order to understand it and, in turn, find solutions, it is necessary to dig a little deeper into the myriad problems that surround this field at a more administrative level. According to Dr Mahbubul H Siddique, Associate Professor of Microbiology at BRAC University, the problems are far more deeply rooted than just funding. Systemically, the reason research in Bangladesh rarely tends to have an impact at a policy level has to do with the motivations our researchers have.

Dr Mahbubul, who is also the Chair of the BRAC University Institutional Review Board, further elaborates, “One of the biggest issues with our research sector is the hypothetical carrot that we are chasing. What is our motivation for conducting research? The unfortunate reality is that the amount of time and effort it takes to carry out a research project in this country is far too harsh for the minuscule reward and respect that is obtained as a result of it. Thus, university faculty members in many places only focus on publishing papers—because that allows them to get a promotion. Many of these papers, unfortunately, are not really creating new knowledge or helping anyone. Our criteria for judging research, thus, shouldn’t be counting the number of papers published, but seeing the number of patents they have established. Only then will research work be valued by all fronts.”

One further problem that seems to be looming over researchers is the unfortunate yet very apparent skill gap among the scientists working today. Dr Mahbubul highlights this, stating that, “We need to establish more facilities to train our researchers, both young and new, to bring them all to the same level. I have seen many high-level scientists having no clue how to operate new tools and, on the flip



side, fresh researchers simply do not have enough exposure or skills required for research. Both of these must be addressed at an institutional level.”

The solution, then, is to establish further scopes of training and skill development. Unfortunately, most of the problems presented are very interlinked, and the system can only be improved once tackled holistically. If research is merely motivated by instantaneous profit, then attempting long-term changes will pose a big challenge. The bottom line here is that the problems are at our very foundations, and responding to them requires laying the groundwork for the future. Be it in humanities or STEM-related fields, these problems are nearly ubiquitous.

Sumaiya Tasnim, a Lecturer of the Department of English at BRAC University, says, “Bangladesh is hyper-focused on building a space that fosters profitability instead of intellectuality. Some aspects

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of research in the humanities remain unrecognised to the masses because there is a digression in the discourse surrounding rights, particularly regarding gender, women, and the working class. Of course, training and workshops are helpful, but what would be even better is having students and academics work with scholars to learn methods of researching and bringing new ideas to the humanities department.”

Dr Salekul Islam, Professor at the Department of Computer Science and Engineering at United International University, shares some closing thoughts on the matter, highlighting the need for collaboration to create integrated systems for research work to be valued. “Combining research work with industrial needs is a way to tackle the issue of lack of funding, but that too needs to be done carefully and by analysing the needs of both academia and industry.

Partnerships of different kinds will also help researchers grow.”

The bottom line is clear: to move forward, it is imperative that innovators and researchers work to create a collaborative environment where scientific and analytical thinking is promoted. The culture of research must, thus, be built from the ground up in order to instill the necessity of it for generations to come. As a community, the pursuit and accessibility of knowledge should be nurtured in order to ensure that supervisors, as well as research officers, are both equipped with the tools required to carry out potentially groundbreaking research that will aid in the development of knowledge and tools useful for both the country and the world at large.

Raian Abedin is a poet, a contributor for *The Daily Star*, and a final-year student at North South University.



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