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Higher Education Taking Action Towards the Sustainable Development Goals:
Perspectives from Asia and Europe



Interview | Conducted by Isbat Ibn Hasnat Research in Bangladeshi Universities



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Isbat Ibn Hasnat

Thank you for arranging the time for the interview. I am going to ask you a few questions about the universities in Bangladesh. I would like to start with administrative issues. Why do you think universities in Bangladesh failed to achieve international standards? Or what do you think is wrong about the universities in our country in general that motivates students and lecturers to leave the country and look for better options abroad?

Mr. Adnan M. S. Fakir

To begin with, I personally think that universities in Bangladesh lack in capacity building. Faculties and departments are not well equipped to handle the number of students' universities take each year, which effects the overall quality of education in the universities. Compared to the number of students, the lecturers are very low. Thus, lecturers in the universities end up taking a lot of courses. Moreover, I believe one of the major problems in our universities is that opinions shared by lecturers and faculty members are not considered by the administrative body. Specially in private universities, decisions are highly influenced based on profits instead of the goodwill of the institution.

Isbat Ibn Hasnat

How do you think these problems can be solved in an administrative level or even national level?

Mr. Adnan M. S. Fakir

These problems can only be solved by changing the culture in the universities and employing the right people in the right places. Many talented researchers and professors are coming back to Bangladesh from abroad to contribute to the development. I believe if we can find them and utilize their knowledge, it is possible to change the scenario very fast. We also need to provide discipline specific skills development workshops to university faculty members, so that they are well equipped to teach students and involve them in research. There are many workshops that are offered, but they are very general and follows a one for all approach. Each department is different from the other, we need to consider discipline specific workshops, so that faculty members from each department can acquire the knowledge and skill necessary for their own background.

Isbat Ibn Hasnat

Since my focus for the conference will be lack of research interests in Bangladeshi universities, what do you think about that? Why aren't we giving higher focus to research in the universities? The core function of a university was supposed to be research, but universities in Bangladesh ignore this function. Why do you think this happens?

Mr. Adnan M. S. Fakir

I have to say once again that it is the culture of the universities in Bangladesh that is at fault here. I totally agree with you that the core function of a university should be research, however, in Bangladesh the prime expectation from a faculty member is to teach. Like I said before, faculty members devote all their time in teaching; there is almost no time for them to do research. There is also no incentive mechanism within the university for the faculty members to devote their time to research. If an individual wants to do research, they have to do it independently. Moreover, most universities lack the basic resources to do research and given that there is no incentive mechanism, faculty members do not have a research focus during their time in the university either.

Isbat Ibn Hasnat

You talked about the perspective of faculty members and administration. What about the students?

Why aren't they motivated to get involved in research? During my studies in Germany, I saw many Asian students have a hard time to do research work and we felt that we are far behind from the European students in terms of practical research work. Why do you think this happens?

Mr. Adnan M. S. Fakir

Students need a mentor and needs to be shown a direction if they want to get involved in research. If the university and the faculty members who teach them are not motivated themselves, how can they possibly motivate the students? Moreover, there are no proper master's degree in Bangladesh that is focused on

research. In most undergrad and graduate programs in Bangladesh, there are often no mandatory thesis work. It is obvious that they don't feel prepared when they move abroad for further studies. If you see the universities in Europe, they have proper master and PhD programs in their universities, where students from different degree programs can exchange ideas, knowledge and experiences. This gives the students some perspective about research and academia. Students in Bangladesh do not get that opportunity. Moreover, you may also see that there are research presentations every week or so in European universities. None of these problems are addressed in our universities.

Isbat Ibn Hasnat

Now that we have addressed the problems, what do you think could be the possible solutions to the problems? How can we involve lecturers and students into research? Do you think collaborations between European and Bangladeshi universities can help solve this problem? If yes, then how?

Mr. Adnan M. S. Fakir

We need to build a proper curriculum to address this problem. Courses and hands on workshops for students as well as faculty members can be arranged. In our universities, we hold seminars where people go and listen, workshops are much more interesting and interactive compared to seminars. Collaborations are very important to address this problem. Just like I mentioned before, faculty members need incentives to do research; collaborations can be a source of incentive for all to get involved in research. Faculty and student exchange programs can be very effective. Not only exchange programs, researchers and resourceful people can come to Bangladeshi universities and offer hands- on workshops for students and faculty members. Through such programs, they can get a perspective which they can implement in the universities. There can also be research exchanges. For example, when a research project is introduced with let us say 10 researchers in a European university, they can assign 1 or 2 people from South Asian countries. This way we can build a research culture within the universities. The good thing about building a research culture is that you do not need a lot of people or effort to initiate it. If we can manage to prepare 4-5 students or faculty members for research in each university, a research culture is automatically established.