

# Promoting Social Science Research in Education

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**Abstract :** The paper highlights the overall situation of social research and assess the initiatives taken in the past in order to promote research activities with particular reference to education sector in Bangladesh. Social Science Research in Bangladesh has been passing through a transitional phase, it is neither recognized as one of the important instrument for solving the society's problems nor it has received active support by the Government. Mere adhoc policy without political support and without implementing strategies and development programme has created the overall situation more complex. While, it has been accepted as one of the vital issues of taking appropriate decision, but the Government of Bangladesh has not yet recognized the importance of social science research which has created uncertainties of social research both in education and other social sciences. Government should immediately recognize the role of social science research and provide strong policy support to implement mainly through educational sector. Simultaneously Government should allocate necessary funds for undertaking social science research and make sure to assign all teachers of universities and colleges to get involved in research activities.

## 1.0 Introduction

1.1 Research is a '*prime vehicle*' through which developed countries are unfolding their inquisitiveness and discovering issues and addresses for their socio-economic development in all spheres of life. The history of human civilization clearly indicates that it flourishes from one stage to another through acquiring knowledge and skills on the basis of experience and research. There are many examples and references of contribution of research throughout human civilization.

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The research's on science and technological innovations in the Western Europe for example contributed towards tremendous development mainly in the physical sciences in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

1.2 At the same time, US industrial revolution in 1860 is generally considered as the formal starting point of transforming the country from an almost totally agrarian society to an industrial one. The invention of steam engine, airplane and lunar missions greatly speeded industrial development but it failed to create an enabling situation for prosperity, productivity and rational wages. The main causes of this situation was attributed by sociologists to the fact that the sociological, physical and psychological aspects of human beings were not studied and even considered.

1.3 At this point social science research made a significant contribution in identifying the major issues to be addressed for overcoming this situation. After much analysis, a team of psychologists led by *Elton Mayo* found that sociological aspects such as motivation, interpersonal relations, hierarchy, code of ethics, power, authority and leadership, voting rights and freedom of speech were the main ingredients not included in the production process<sup>2</sup>. Since then developed countries are undertaking research activities covering both science and technology and human aspects of the society.

1.4 The above discussion clearly indicates that science and technological research alone would not be able to develop a society unless it gives equal emphasis on social science research. This has categorically claimed by *Daniel Wren* (1999) that the main reason of developing the North America and Western European States was recognition of the importance of research and provision of all necessary support to promote research activities from science and technology to all other disciplines. He further reiterated that these research works on every sphere of life have made the US and Western Europe developed nations. Had there been no such research activity

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<sup>1</sup> Excellent background information on the importance of social science research is available in Claire Selitz *Research Methods in Social Relations*(New York 1983) and in Bert Hoselitz (ed) *A Readers Guide to the Social Science* (New York 1978) as well as in Dr. A.K.M. Ghulam Robbani, (Former Secretary), *Social Science Research in Bangladesh : Its Current Status and a Prognosis of Its Future Trend*. Statistics Division, Government of Bangladesh. *Social Science Research in Bangladesh*, March 1997.

<sup>2</sup> For detail description please note Alex Carey, "Management in Educational Research: Historical Perspectives" *American Sociological Review*(June 1967)pp 404-416.

they would have remained undeveloped nations and the position of development in the context science and technology as well as other areas would have possibly remained at the stage of any third world country.<sup>3</sup>

1.5 The available data demonstrate that the developed countries spend more than 4 percent of their annual expenditure on social science research. During the last 7 years, US Federal Government's investment in social science research increased by nearly 45% from 1993-2000 with emphasis on education and health. The budget allocation was \$ 20.3 billion to develop a balanced portfolio in social science research, an increase of 1.3 million or 7% over 2000. While the funding support for Universities and Colleges has grown roughly to \$ 16.5 billion, a 42% increase since 1993. The budget of 1999 proposes \$ 17.8 million for University-based research which is an increase of \$ 1.3 billion over 2000.<sup>4</sup>

1.6 On the contrary, the scenario of physical and social research activities in the third world countries was reverse, where there was no scope to mention any significant contribution made so far. Research neither received active support nor was promoted by the third world governments in the past and present. Mere policy support in undertaking research without providing appropriate strategies and implementation plan has made the situation more complex and frustrating making research unexpected, unwanted and on insignificant aspect of development. The Bangladesh situation is even worse than the other third world countries.

## 2.0 The Objectives of the Paper

2.1 The purpose of this paper is to highlight the status of social science research in general and it attempts to address the interventions needed to promote social science research in education in the Bangladesh context. To achieve these objectives the paper has been divided into a number of sections. The *First section* deals with the conceptual issues of social science research and its importance in education. *The second* section of the paper highlights the status of social science research in Bangladesh. *While, the third section* of the paper addresses the critical interventions and initiatives to be taken by

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Wren, *The Evolution of Management thought*' 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York, Ronald Press, 2001,p.32).

<sup>4</sup> The World Bank, *US Education and Research Review*, The University Press Limited, 2001, p.32.

the policy makers in order to promote social science research. It also contains a few observations and recommendations that could be used as policy options for concerned agencies. The paper is based on the theoretical ideas and concepts available as secondary information, as well as knowledge of the author.

### **3.0 Conceptual ideas of Research**

**3.1** Research in simple words can be explained as any systematic and careful search or investigation to find out new knowledge or ideas for solving a problem or answering a question raised by the researcher. Research activities could be on the basis of nature of major disciplines divided into two broad categories:

- (i) Research in Physical/Natural Sciences and
- (ii) Research in Social Science.

**3.2** Physical sciences deal with pertinent issues which can be put to laboratory tests under guided conditions. Whereas social research deals with social phenomena mainly based on human behaviour which is influenced by many factors such as political, social, economical, cultural, and psychological. It is not usually possible to put human beings to laboratory tests.

### **4.0 Definitions of Social Research**

**4.1** Social Research is a scientific undertaking which by means of logical and systematized techniques aims to discover new facts or verify and test old facts, analyze their sequences, inter-relationships and causal explanation. These ideas are derived within an appropriate theoretical frame of reference, develop new scientific tools, concepts and theories which would facilitate reliable and valid study of human behaviour.<sup>5</sup>

**4.2** According to Smith and White (1929), Social Research seeks to find explanation to as unexplained social phenomena, to clarify the doubtful and correct the misconceived facts of social life. In reality no line of demarcation can be drawn between basic or applied of research. Each is dependent on the other for development and verification.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> P.V. Young, Scientific Social Survey and Research, Asian Publishing House, 1962, New York.

<sup>6</sup> Smith & White, An experiment in social research, University of Chicago Press, 1929, Chicago.

**4.3** Moser (1955) defines Social Research as a systematic method of exploring analysis and conceptualizing social life in order to extend, correct or verify knowledge, whether that knowledge aid in the construction of a theory or in the practice of an art.<sup>7</sup> It is the scientific analysis of the nature and trends of social phenomena of groups or in general of human behaviour so as to formulate broad principles and scientific concepts.<sup>8</sup> It is systematized investigation to gain new knowledge about social phenomena and surveys.<sup>9</sup>

## **5.0 Status of Social Research in Bangladesh**

**5.1** From the proceeding discussion it shows that social research plays most a vital role not only in identifying the present situation of existing social problems but also helps to examine evaluate and analyze the problems as to know how these could be solved in scientific way. The present section attempts to highlight the status of social science research in Bangladesh with particular reference to education sector in the following paragraphs.

**5.2** Social science research in Bangladesh since its introduction after the achievement of independence in the country, has not been able to firmly establish its importance and recognition to the Government of Bangladesh, NGOs and even in the private sector compared to a developed country.<sup>10</sup> During the Fourth Five Year Plan, Bangladesh invested about Tk. 2.3 billion for higher education through Annual Development Plan(ADP) or 71 percent of the Fourth Plan's allocation for education. Review of past allocation for education in Bangladesh indicates that the budget provision was from modest to fairly good. Despite modest allocation, expenditure in research was only about 0.5 percent to 1.5 percent of University budget which is very insignificant.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> C.A. Moser, *Survey Methods in Social Investigation*, William Heinemann Ltd. 1955, London.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Stevenson, *Research Methods in Social Relations*, Methuen & Company, 1967, USA.

<sup>9</sup> M.H. Gopal, *An Introduction to Research Procedure in Social Science*, Asia Publishing House, 1964, Bombay.

<sup>10</sup> UNESCO, *Social Sciences in Asia: Bangladesh, Iran, Malaysia, Pakistan, Thailand Reports and papers in the Social Sciences NO. 32*, Paris 1976.

<sup>11</sup> The World Bank, *Bangladesh Education Sector Review, Volume-III*, University Press Limited, 2000, p.64.

**5.3** Educational Institutions spend the bulk of their funds on staff salaries (90 percent at BITs and 77 percent at universities), transportation and utilities leaves very little for research. In 1996, Dhaka University spent the equivalent of only 1.5 percent of its UGC grant on research; BUET spent 1.4 percent on research; and the University of Rajshahi the amount was less than 0.5 percent.<sup>12</sup> While, research output in social science from these universities are not only very insignificant but their contributions do not reach its potential or societal expectations and the topics relevant to social problems has been substantially curtailed by the lack of recurrent budgets.<sup>13</sup>

**5.4** Judged by the above criteria, social science research outputs currently produced in the Universities and affiliated Research Institutes of the country are indeed of very poor quality. The volume of annual outputs is quite insignificant and their contribution in developing quality education, curriculum development and solving the prevailing problems like campus violence, terrorism, corruption, etc. have no value. The Universities and the affiliated research institutes account for a major share of Ph.D. holders and highly qualified social science researchers in the country. Most of these teachers and scholars are however busy with consultancy works in various research projects or programmes sponsored by donors, NGOs or Government agencies, thereby neglecting academic research in their own institutions.

**5.5** Although criteria for promotion to higher position in an university requires specified numbers of research papers but such rules are not rigorously followed and promotions are often awarded on the basis of length of service or counting newspaper articles on trivial matter or topics of transient interest as research outputs. Academic research institutes too appear to have abandoned research and converted themselves mostly as teaching or training bodies, paralleling the activities of the established departments.<sup>14</sup>

**5.6** While research at the college level is even more frustrating as there is no specific budget allocation to undertake research either for designing quality education and curriculum development or for promotion of a teacher's own career. More than 99 percent of budget allocation of colleges is spent on salaries, administration and establishing new colleges and purchasing machinery and equipment for

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> University Grant Commission Annual Report, Dhaka, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

their laboratories. Moreover, college teachers do not have any obligation to undertake research on social problems and sharing the findings of the study with the students in order to explain socio-economic realities.

**5.7** The absence of a comprehensive education policy in the country is attributed as one of important factors for not being developing research culture at the college level. During last three decades research contribution at the college level in developing quality education, analyzing overall unrest situation in the college campuses or terrorism is very insignificant. Though a few sporadic initiatives were taken by some highly motivated college teachers in undertaking social science research on the various issues leading to higher degree, but most of their attempts remain unfinished not only for necessary institutional support but also for want of required fund allocation.

**5.8** The Government of Bangladesh established the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in 1976 to promote social science research and provide policy and planning advice to the Government and act as a national coordination body in the form of establishing a systematic channel of communication and information dissemination so that planners, policy makers and administrators receive regular feed back from the social science researchers. During the last two and half decade the Council has provided financial grants for about 100 research projects for undertaking research on social science. It has in collaboration with Bureau of Economic Research of the University of Dhaka and Department of Sociology, University of Rajshahi so far conducted 35 research methodology courses and organized 15 workshop and seminars.<sup>15</sup> Review of the activities past of the two and decades of the Council shows that it suffers from structural deficiencies that prevent it from making adequate impact on the current status of social science research through coordination and bringing it within the country's national network.

**5.9** On the other hand, creation of the Social Science Research Council encouraged the policy makers and senior administrators as well as executives working in the various ministries, departments, directorates, corporations and even in Banks and Insurance companies to establish research and development cells/wings in their respective offices. This initiative in fact created an opportunity to employ a few young promising and talented researchers in the country. However

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<sup>15</sup> Draft Social Science Research Policy, SSRC, June 1992.

these cells/wings lack organizational vision and mission and are also deprived of top management support. Over the years as the personnel were not used as researchers rather they were utilized as officers for doing routine work like manager and administrator of an organization, the initiative lost its thrust and failed to produce expected results.

**5.10** Apart from this negative scenario, there have been quite a few significant development oriented action research that have made widespread impact and contribution both within and outside the country. Among which the most outstanding achievement, for example, is the *Cômilla Model* and *Grameen Bank Approach* for poverty alleviation and micro-credit and mobilization of marginal saving. The other significant contribution, for example, in Bangladesh Rural Advancement Council (BRAC) formulated mass literacy and health care programme for the rural poor and income generating activities at the grass root level.

**5.11** Similarly, various demographic and population research works have significantly strengthened population policy and enabled the country to increasingly adopt family planning measures, and raise and sustain contraceptive prevalence rate. Simultaneous, National Institute for Population and Research Training (NIPORT) and Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) are two organizations which emerged amongst the Government organizations as leading institutions for carrying out training oriented research of the personnel involved in nation-wide health and family planning service delivery programmes. National Academy for Education and Management (NAEM) also put its sincere efforts to develop the manpower on educational management and research methodology and undertaking research study on the various issues of college education and its administrative problems. While, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), Bangladesh Agricultural Rural and Development (BARD), Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre (BPATC), Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS), Academy, Rural Development Academy (RDA) and National Institute of Population and Social Organization for Management (NIPSOM) are amongst the autonomous organizations, carrying out important research on various issues of socio-economic development such as development administration, rural development and poverty alleviation environment and disaster management and gender and reproductive Health. Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), however, has progressively developed its capacity for social research and is currently recognized as an outstanding organization for economic and social research both at home and abroad.



5.12 Moreover, wide application of microcomputer and development of user friendly packages of analysis are helping rapid diffusion of various analytical methods amongst the social scientists. Besides, a few participatory methods of investigations such as RPA and Focus Group Discussion (FGD), case studies research at the grass root levels are also gaining wide acceptance in Bangladesh social science.

## **6.0 Interventions for Promoting Social Science Research in Bangladesh**

6.1 From the above discussion it is clear that unlike other countries the social science research in general does not receive its due attention by the Government of Bangladesh. The country is suffering from a number of problems among which lack of legal and policy support, lack of inadequate funding as well as lack of importance and its role and absence of institutional support. These are some of the *major barriers* that are currently preventing the promotion of social science research activities in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, we have passed more than three decades without having a *social science research policy and education policy*.

6.2 Particularly, social science research in education that remains to be of paramount importance due to its role in the advancement of socio-economic development is yet to get due attention in Bangladesh. There is no denying the fact that education as a sector gets highest budget allocation. But unfortunately, most of it is mainly spent on paying salaries of teachers and only a small amount of the money is spent for development of quality of education as well as research. It is therefore high time to promote social science research activities in the country, and unless concerted efforts are taken both at the national and organizational level the promotion of social science research would remain far from expectation. Therefore the following section is an attempt to highlight the most potential interventions that could be considered for the promotional aspects of social science research in Bangladesh.

### **(i) Government Commitment**

Government commitment is prerequisite for the promotion of social research in any country. The Government of Bangladesh's commitment towards Social Research in the country needs to be unequivocal and the government must make all out efforts to encourage and utilize social

research for improving the social welfare of the country. Education sector is the most appropriate area through which commitment for the advancement of research activities could be easily initiated and implemented for solving any social problem. Thus, appropriate policy directives and the administrative support for social research is essential for accepting the idea not only for teachers but also other researchers.

## **(ii) Policy for Social Science Research**

Social Science Research Policy should be an integral part of the country's overall development of policy and the operational linkages between the two needs to be clearly articulated and strengthened. For immediate action steps need to be taken to adopt and implement the draft Social Science Research Policy by including some important issues and removing some of its apparent weaknesses. Similarly, comprehensive education policy is to be formulated emphasizing both quality education and research as an important intervention for socio-economic development.

## **(iii) Strengthening Institutional Capacity**

(a) The Government must strengthen university and college-based research activities by assigning the teachers to undertake research on social problem in order to use the findings of the research for solving problems. The Government also needs to strengthen the Social Science Research Council(SSRC) particularly its manpower and range of activities and make the Council self reliant and sustainable by making a sizable financial endowment. Other national institutions like BIDS, BPATC, BCS Academy, BARD, RDA and NAEM actively associated in social science research are to be encouraged to build their research capacity and the Council could act as the coordination body to bridge the gap between two types of institutions, whose responsibility would lead the research through advice and guidance to staff and deliver a professional lecture in the area of how social science research could be undertaken in a meaningful way.

(b) Moreover, this capacity building would also facilitate strengthening the research activities and help to formulate policy for concerned officials in the public sector. This initiative would also help the policy makers to disseminate the idea and implement it in the field level.

## **(iv) Training and Awareness Programme**

(a) Research without formal training cannot provide a meaningful output that could be utilized for solving social problems. Social Science Research Council and other specialized training institutions require to be entrusted to organize professional research methodology courses on social science research to strengthen the capabilities of the young and middle-level teachers and researchers working in the colleges and universities of the country. Moreover, regular workshops, seminars and conferences on the importance of social science research are to be organized at the national and regional level in order to understand the importance of social science and disseminate the idea of research to the grass root level. Besides, leaflet, pamphlet and handbook on Social Science Research Methodology should be prepared in collaboration with the Council and distribute them among the college teachers through out the country.

(b) The emerging trend of personal computer application in various branches of social science research in the country should be actively encouraged and fostered by the Council. Therefore, regular training courses on computer application, use and development of software packages for data analysis, storage and management should be arranged by the Council.

#### **(v) Fund Allocation**

Necessary funding arrangement is essential for undertaking research activities in social science. Government must ensure the required fund allocation for undertaking research in educational institutions. There should be separate allocation for research in the annual budget for each and every college where specific amount of money allocated for this purpose must be spent for research. Moreover, Progress of research activities are to be monitored by the respective college authorities showing achievements made on the basis of the annual targets after the end of the financial year and report them to the controlling ministry/directorate, Failing which will result in the cancellation of budget allocation for the next financial year of the concerned college.

#### **(vi) Integration with Promotion**

Research is a not only a complex task but also a highly intellectual job, which requires basic training and extensive practice through out the career. Involvement of all teachers can not be ensured unless it is integrated as compulsory criteria for a teacher's promotion in every step working in the Universities and Colleges. This requirement should

simultaneously be integrated in case of recruitment and selection of teachers.

### **(vii) Document for Social Planning**

(a) Social science research work in general to be considered as an aid in formulating normative standards that are useful in framing socio-economic plans for comparison and for evaluation of such plans. It should be accepted as a document for social planning and development by policy makers, planners and professionals and the academicians working in the Universities and Colleges.

(b) There should be policy decision that the Government would utilize the findings and recommendations of research work undertaken by the college teachers as document for social planning and solving the concerned problem. Therefore, every effort should be made to produce quality research so that the findings could be accepted by the Government to solve the social problems.

### **(viii) Enhancing Social Welfare**

Social science research also considers to judge the magnitude of social evils and help in taking necessary steps to remove them. In the western context a large number of legislation and reformative measures owe their origin to the findings of social surveys. For example, survey of socio-economic conditions of specific group of people and laborers are used in improving their economic conditions. The sociologists not only find the magnitude but also the real cause of evils and to devise ways to hit at the root of these evils should use social science research.

### **(ix) Formulating Social Laws**

Similarly social science research findings could provide meaningful scope of formulating social laws which show relationship between social facts and their causes. Once the existence of causative factors and their magnitude is known, we can predict the result. Although some time accurate prediction is not possible due to complexity of social phenomena, variety of causative factors and their unsuitability, yet certain broad trends can be definitely located.

### **(x) Solution of Endless Social Problems**

Finally, social science research would get its due importance and play a vital role for the overall development of the country when Government of Bangladesh considered it as a solution of endless social problems such as unequal distribution of wealth, problem of unemployment, problem of dowry, etc. There should be a policy decision that solution to any social problems should be based on research findings and teachers can extend best possible help in undertaking such research in endless social problems.

## 7.0 Conclusion

7.1 The paper has tried to highlight the overall situation of social research and assess the initiatives taken in the past in order to promote research activities with particular reference to education sector in Bangladesh. The findings constitute towards a conclusion that Social Science Research in Bangladesh has been passing through a transitional phase, it is neither recognized as one of the important instruments for solving the society's problems nor it has received active support by the Government. Mere adhoc policy without political support and without implementing strategies and development programme has created the overall situation of social science research as trivial issue. While, it has been accepted as one of the vital issues of taking appropriate decision of a given problem by the governments in most of the developed countries, but the Government of Bangladesh has not yet recognized the importance of social science research which has created uncertainties of social research both in education and other social sciences.

7.2 To overcome this situation the Government should immediately recognize the role of social science research and provide strong policy support to implement mainly through educational sector. Simultaneously Government should allocate necessary funds for undertaking social science research and make sure to assign all teachers of universities and colleges to get involved in research activities with a provision for using the findings for policy options. Finally, it can be said that *if research is a 'prime vehicle' for the overall development of a nation then its policy would be the steering it and education would be the wheel of the vehicle.*

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