

# For nation-building, we need to pay attention to the Humanities



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The urgent need for comprehensive reforms in key areas such as the constitution, education, judiciary, and public administration points to the necessity for expertise from a wide array of disciplines, particularly those rooted in the humanities

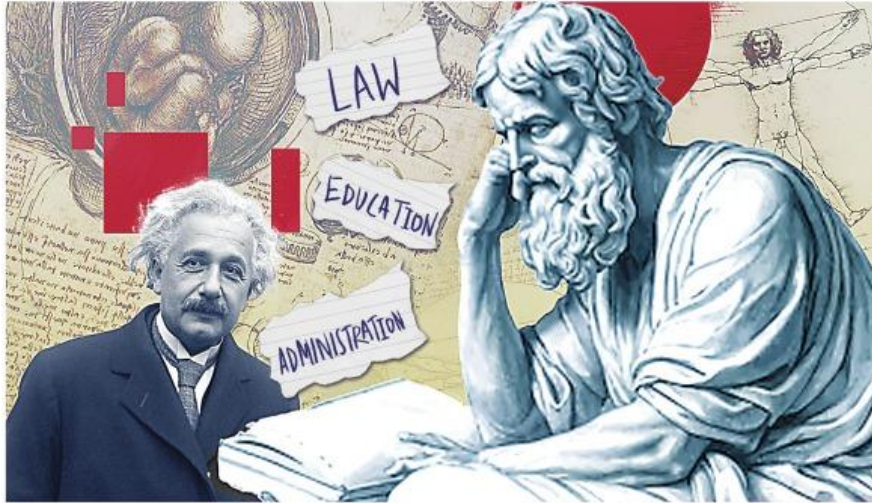


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In contemporary discussions on improving global university rankings, particularly in Bangladesh, a common argument emphasises the importance of producing original, high-quality publications and ensuring proper citation as key factors in boosting a university's standing. This often results in the prioritisation of disciplines that generate higher research output, predominantly in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Advocates for this approach often emphasise the perceived efficiency of STEM disciplines, only to assert that these disciplines contribute more significantly to a nation's economic development and global competitiveness because they publish more than humanities fields. The underlying assumption is that greater research productivity translates directly into societal benefits.

However, this emphasis on quantity poses a significant threat to the humanities, as it disregards their critical role in cultivating intellectual depth, ethical reflection, and addressing complex societal issues. This perspective is both reductive and myopic, especially in light of pressing national chal-

lenges, such as the need for constitutional and administrative reforms following transformative events like the 2024 mass uprising in Bangladesh.

The urgent need for comprehensive reforms in key areas such as the constitution, education, judiciary, and public administration points to the necessity for expertise from a wide array of disciplines, particularly those rooted in the humanities. It is imperative to recognise that no one is perhaps better than a philosopher when it comes to clarifying complex concepts and streamlining analysis. Philosophers possess the skills to dissect intricate ideas and construct frameworks that are essential for effective governance and societal progress.

Moreover, the current emphasis on STEM fields, driven by the allure of quantifiable research outputs, neglects a fundamental reality: effective governance and societal development rely on a diverse array of specialists. While it is true that the humanities may not yield as many publications as their STEM counterparts, their contribution to shaping the policies and values that underpin a functioning democracy is invaluable.

Prioritising fields that produce an abundance of research papers at the expense of the humanities poses a significant risk to the country's ability to manage complex and multidimensional reforms.

Consider the recent national demand for constitutional reform, which has emerged as a rallying point for a more inclusive and representative governance structure. Can engineers or scientists, regardless of their brilliance in their respective fields, be expected to lead this crucial process? The expertise required for such profound societal changes emerges from the humanities, law, and social sciences.

These disciplines cultivate critical thinking, ethical reflection, and a deep understanding of human behaviour, governance, and law. By neglecting these areas in favour of those perceived as more "productive," we create a dangerous imbalance in the knowledge and expertise necessary for nation-building.

The call for educational reform must also include a reconsideration of how we allocate resources within our academic institutions. Rather than indiscriminately expanding the number of departments and universities to

boost publication output, we should focus on consolidating our educational resources.

A smaller number of high-quality institutions, perhaps fifteen to twenty, could facilitate deeper engagement with crucial areas of study while upholding rigorous academic standards. This consolidation would allow for better resource allocation and emphasise quality over quantity. The aim should be to cultivate robust academic institutions that contribute meaningfully and enduringly to society rather than simply chasing rankings through sheer output.

It is also vital to recognise that achieving a higher ranking through a singular focus on the quantity of publications is shortsighted and ultimately detrimental to the overall health of our educational system. Sustainable educational development necessitates qualitative improvements, which include addressing systemic issues such as political interference that impede our universities. The assumption that merely adjusting syllabi to comply with outcome-based education (OBE) requirements will resolve these deeper challenges is fundamentally misguided.

True change will arise from improvements in the quality of education that embrace diverse disciplines and acknowledge the broader role of universities in cultivating an informed and reflective citizenry. Universities should serve as incubators of critical thought that enable students to grapple with moral dilemmas, societal challenges, and the complexities of human existence. This broader educational vision is essential in preparing individuals who can contribute to a more just and equitable society.

Additionally, the role of universities in cultivating a reflective citizenry cannot be overstated. In an age characterised by rapid technological advancements and shifting socio-political landscapes, the ability to think critically and engage thoughtfully with diverse perspectives is more important than ever.

As we face global challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and political instability, a well-rounded education that includes the humanities becomes imperative. It is through the humanities that we can nurture empathy, cultivate moral reasoning, and encourage a nuanced understanding of the human condition.

Relying solely on the OBE model or prioritising rankings misses the larger picture. Genuine progress in education emerges from nurturing critical thinking. **1 SEE PAGE 14 COL 3**

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diverse expertise, and a commitment to addressing society's complex challenges. The complexities of the modern world demand individuals who are not only skilled in technical competencies but also capable of ethical deliberation and reflective judgement. The cultivation of these attributes is essential for long-term, sustainable development.

Furthermore, the dismissal of the humanities in favour of STEM disciplines encourages a narrow view of education's purpose. Education is not merely a mechanism for producing skilled labourers or enhancing economic output; it is a fundamental

pillar of democratic society. As such, it must encompass a wide range of disciplines that promote intellectual curiosity, ethical reasoning, and a comprehensive understanding of human experiences.

In fine, the conversation surrounding the enhancement of global university rankings must extend beyond a simplistic focus on research output. By prioritising a holistic approach to education that values the contributions of the humanities, we can address the urgent national issues facing Bangladesh today.

A well-rounded education system that promotes critical thinking, diverse expertise, and ethical reflection is key to

ensuring long-term societal stability and progress. Without this, the country's already beleaguered education system may become further complicated by seemingly insurmountable issues.

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