

“Enough PhDs ... Thank You”

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“Innovation has nothing to do with how many R&D dollars you have. When Apple came-up with the Mac, IBM was spending at least 100 times more on R&D. It’s not about money. It’s about the people you have, how you’re led, and how much you get it” – Steve Jobs.

Innovation and Creativity go side-by-side. The currency of success in the coming years is undoubtedly related to creativity. It is also evident that innovation, whether disruptive or sustaining, requires champions of innovation at all levels of the organization to be successful. In this era of electronic and social media, most failures are highly broadcasted and reprimanded. A single innovation failure can outstand and outshine dozens of successful ones. Therefore, every innovative researcher needs to develop a steadfast ability to take calculated and rational risks for a successful impact.

“When all think alike, then no one is thinking”

(Walter Lippman)

It is quite unfortunate that Pakistan is lagging behind in terms of research and development as compared to other developing countries like Malaysia, Singapore and India. Pakistan ranks at 105 of 129 countries in the 2019 Report of Global Innovation Index compared to India that stood 52nd. The report explores the impact of policies by the Government on declining economic growth and progress in science and development in our educational institutions.¹ Exploring the Higher Education Commission (HEC) website, it is quite clear that more than 5000 Ph.Ds are produced in Pakistan in the last 4 years, which is, on no account, a diminutive figure but regrettably this number is not significantly contributing to the country's technological development. In the last decade, HEC has funded thousands of Pakistani scholars to study abroad for Ph.D spending billions of rupees. Despite most of these funded-Ph.D scholars have come back and are serving on higher teaching posts at universities, still the index of Pakistan's research and innovation over the past 05 years fails to reveal interesting facts. Consequently, instead of lamenting over lack of opportunities for research education in Pakistan, we must hunt for the loose cannon elsewhere.

Public sector organizations are the weaponries of the government in delivering much required quality services to the citizens especially in the developing economies. On the other hand, public institutions continue to be plagued by inefficiency, undue influence, and high levels of corruption in academic

research.² Currently, in Pakistan, there are now 22 established Offices of Research, Innovation and Commercialization (ORIC) in universities across the country with others in the pipeline. HEC has released indirect funding to encourage the set-up of these offices that still largely are struggling for their own survival rather than fulfilling the purpose of their inception. Within the objectives of establishment of ORICs, provision on university-industry linkage grants, business incubation centres and technology parks and knowledge transfer programme aims are all integral to innovative development. We all are looking forwards to see *how far this fantasy will change into realism?*

While research funding agencies in Pakistan are trying to act as an aqueduct between basic and applied research at universities, most of the funding from them is won by the projects that turn out to be trifling works of *“reinventing the wheel”* rather than any novel scientific work.³ Similarly HEC has invested a lot in Tenure Track System (TTS) for faculty at universities with an aim to amplify the quality of research in academia. Unfortunately, despite enjoying competitive financial inducements, most of the Ph.D TTS faculty, keeping aside the warnings and clear policy guidelines by HEC, is involved in huge administrative tasks at universities which engrave a big question mark on their output as researchers. The most deplorable fact behind this story is the undue and unjust support to these administrative assignments by universities themselves.

Under these circumstances, improving Pakistan's ranking on the innovation list is analogous to a fairytale coming true. *Enough PhD's, thank you!*⁴

As a matter of fact, no country grows its economy by publishing thousands of paper currency. Similarly no university system truly enhances by enrolling and producing large number of PhDs through slip-roads, or by accepting, hollow and substandard research synopses and theses, as valid. Instead, the way forward entails adhering to uncompromised ethical standards, nurturing excellence, disallowing mediocrity, and inculcating a spirit of inquiry and intellectual regeneration in medical students.

We as Professors and Heads of departments at University level share a huge burden of responsibility in paving a unique and dynamic opportunity for exploring need based strategies to implement in the field of innovative academic research in basic, paraclinical and clinical disciplines and possible commercialization in future. Distinguishing the possible barriers and enablers of innovation, crafting a structural climate that values the utilization of research and providing support to smoothly carry out research activities together with accountability from those in whom resources are invested, will expand the long term productivity of research and its diffusion. Though in the past decade, much has been accomplished towards conducting research that holds great potential for better patient outcomes but still there seems a long way to bring a promise of a beaming global impact of Pakistani Medical Universities to fruition.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None to declare.

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The author is a Professor (MBBS, M.Phil., Ph.D) of Histopathology and strongly advocates promotion of research degrees in Pakistan but not at the cost of integrity and honesty in research practice. She believes quality outshines quantity when you are judged as a "Scholarly Persona".