

EXPLORING BARRIERS AND DRIVERS OF RESEARCH INTEREST AMONG PUBLIC UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN BANGLADESH

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**Critical Journal of Social Sciences
(CJSS)**

ISSN: 3101-0415



Volume 2, No. 1 | 2026

pp. 298 – 312



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.66830/0nbxra72>

Received: April 23, 2026 / Accepted: July 15, 2026

Abstract

Research plays a pivotal role in expanding knowledge, strengthening educational institutions, and advancing national development. This study aims to identify the current state of research practice and explore the specific factors that either motivate or impede students from engaging in research activities. This study employed a quantitative survey to collect data from 237 undergraduates and postgraduates across various faculties at public universities in Bangladesh. Though 78.5% of students expressed keen interest in participating in research activities, only 40.1% were provided the opportunity to participate in research. Networking opportunities, a desire to contribute to society and a passion for innovation were identified as the primary Drivers. Conversely, major barriers include heavy academic workloads and a lack of technical skills. Multiple linear regression analysis further confirmed that intrinsic motivation was the strongest positive predictor of research interest ($\beta = .426$, $p < .001$). Interestingly, factors like supervision and institutional funding did not significantly influence a student's initial interest in participating in research. This study provides a roadmap for universities to improve their policies and support systems by highlighting both drivers and obstacles.

Keywords

Research; Barriers; Drivers; Undergraduate; Bangladesh

1. INTRODUCTION

The involvement in research enriches the learning experience, supports professional development, and increases interest in postgraduate education (Lopatto, 2004). Furthermore, research functions as a major driving force for the advancement of education, scientific innovation and overall national progress (Jubair et al., 2025). Additionally, research provides compelling evidence, which enables various stakeholders to make informed educational decisions while simultaneously having a wider societal impact on teaching methods (Majumder, 2004). Similarly, there is an integral relationship between academic training and scientific inquiry (Moraes et al., 2016). Notably, research opportunities at the undergraduate level not only impart students with the competencies to conduct research, but also augment their problem-solving abilities, as evidenced by a survey of medical graduates of Bangladesh, where 96.7% respondents acknowledge that research is beneficial because it cultivates critical thinking and facilitates implementing policies (Ferdoush et al., 2021). Consequently, research training is also of paramount importance from an institutional perspective. Indeed, the incorporation of research training in the medical curriculum is essential (Amin et al., 2012). Likewise, acquiring research experience at the nascent stages of medical education amplifies the interest of future physicians in joining a research-based profession (Sheikh et al., 2013). Research experience has a substantial impact on career choices and skill development, especially when there is access to effective mentoring (Zydney et al., 2002). Moreover, research involvement has been correlated with students' overall well-being (Walkington & Ommering, 2022), while self-efficacy has been identified as a predominant determinant of interest in research (Lambie et al., 2014).

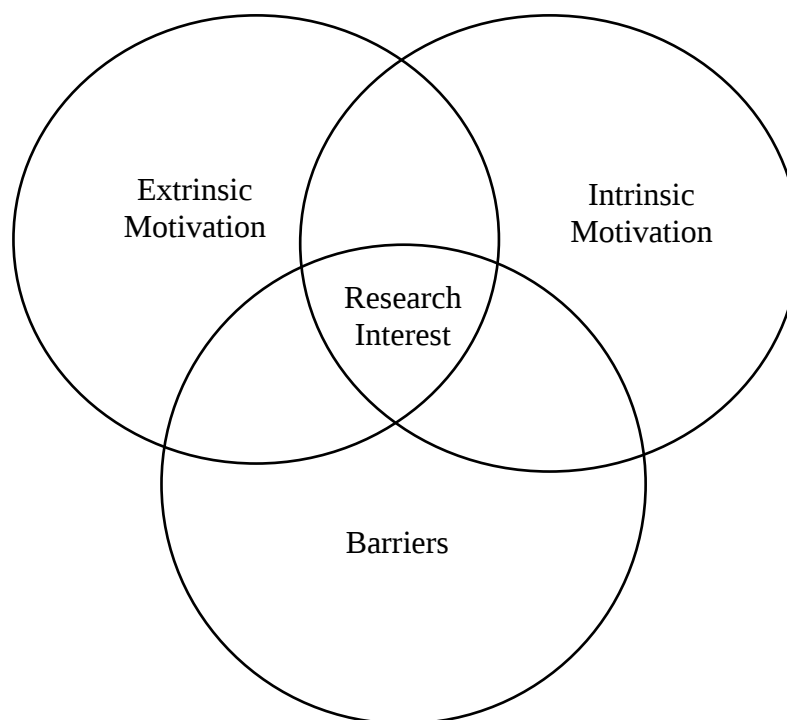
Studies suggest that students often express a research interest, but this does not necessarily translate into active participation. For instance, despite a high level of interest in participating in research (81.7%), formal training is given low priority (Moraes et al., 2016). Furthermore, an increase in positive attitude and a decrease in anxiety after research training has been observed (Wishkoski et al., 2022). However, there is a discrepancy between teachers' expectations and students' actual experiences, where students focus more on performing tasks than creating knowledge (Zou et al., 2024). On the other hand, confidence in research and the expected outcome act as important motivational factors influencing students' participation (Bard et al., 2000). In developing-country contexts, students generally display a positive attitude toward research, but they face significant structural and educational barriers. Despite a high level of familiarity with research methods, only a moderate interest in participation has been observed (Ferdoush et al., 2021). Similarly, in the context of Arab universities, students display a positive attitude but have low levels of knowledge, indicating a clear gap between motivation and participation (Amin et al., 2012). In addition, the limited institutional emphasis on research in Asia, compared to developed countries, makes the research culture relatively weak (Majumder, 2004).

The research environment in Bangladesh is characterized by limited infrastructure, inadequate mentoring, and weak institutional support. Low student participation rates have been highlighted and emphasize the need for national policy coordination. (Hasan et al., 2025). Common challenges include lack of funding, lack of mentorship and guidance, heavy institutional workload, low research familiarity, time constraints, inadequate infrastructure and resources, weak supervision, and limited methodological and statistical expertise (Ferdoush et al., 2021; Jubair et al., 2025; Majumder, 2004; Matin & Khan, 2017; Sheikh et al., 2013). Despite existing research, the number of studies that specifically examine the barriers and drivers of research interest among students in public universities in Bangladesh is limited. Previous studies often focus only on attitude or participation, without encompassing both motivational and barrier-related factors (Ferdoush et al., 2021; Matin & Khan, 2017; Zou et al., 2024). This study addresses these gaps by examining both barriers and drivers of interest in pursuing research, providing insights to inform policy and institutional strategy.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The human propensity to assimilate and explore is universal, yet the transition from a personal passion for innovation to active research is frequently blocked by a landscape of perceived obstacles.

Figure 1 – Determinants of Research Interest



Source: Authors (2026)

Intrinsic motivation is defined as the inherent tendency to engage in an activity for its own internal satisfaction, fun or challenge rather than for any separable consequence or external reward (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this study, it is operationalized through factors such as a personal passion for innovation, the desire to make a social contribution, and the pursuit of networking opportunities. This type of motivation is often described as a 'natural wellspring' of learning and achievement that reflects the human propensity to assimilate and explore (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivation refers to the driver to perform an activity in order to attain a separable outcome or instrumental value, such as a reward or the avoidance of a penalty (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this study, extrinsic drivers include awards and recognition, access to research resources, and faculty supervision. The absence of a structured research framework within Bangladesh's secondary and higher education system deprives students of foundational training, access to scientific literature and mentorship opportunities typically provided in developed nations (Jubair & Mehenaz, 2024). In this study, Barriers are conceptually defined as perceived obstacles that hinder a student's motivation and research productivity, including Institutional funding, excessive workload, lack of training, limited technical skills, social expectations, and gender challenges.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

This study employs a quantitative research approach to rigorously analyze research engagement among public university students in Bangladesh and find out the key drivers and challenges that influence their interest in participation in research. A quantitative approach implies the collection of large-scale, generalized data and supports objectives, analysis and statistical differences across a diverse student population (Creswell, 2014).

Table 1. Analytical Variable

Variables	Description	Sources
Drivers	Intrinsic Motivation refers to the inherent tendency to engage in a task solely for its own satisfaction, regardless of external outcomes. In this study, it was operationalized through networking opportunities, passion for research and contributions to society.	(Ryan & Deci, 2000)

Extrinsic motivation refers to the tendency to engage in an activity for the purpose of achieving a specific and distinct outcome. In this study, it was identified through the opportunity for reward, research resources and faculty supervision.

Barriers	In this study, barriers are defined as perceived obstacles that hinder researchers' motivation and productivity. Institutional funding refers to the inadequacy of financial support allocated to research activities. Excessive workload refers to excessive institutional demands that reduce the time allocated to research. Lack of training refers to the lack of formal preparation for research, while limited technical skills reflect insufficient competence in research materials and methods. Social expectations refer to the external social pressures that discourage research participation and gender challenges refer to the systematic inequalities that disproportionately limit participation in research by certain groups.	Author
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Source: Authors (2026)

3.2 Sampling

In particular, this study targets undergraduate and postgraduate students from multiple public universities across Bangladesh. Due to logistic constraints, limited funding, and the exploratory nature of this study, a convenience sampling technique was employed to recruit participants from the selected public universities in Bangladesh. While convenience sampling allows for efficient data collection from accessible student populations, it poses limitations regarding generalizability. To mitigate this risk and enhance sample diversity, data were collected across various academic years and diverse faculties. Convenience sampling was chosen for the data collection method to collect the data of those who are either experienced or express their eagerness in research activities, thus enhancing the study's relevance and validity (Memon et al., 2025).

3.3 Data collection

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of sections on demographic, motivational and barrier factors and research engagement indicators. This instrument employed a five-point Likert-scale (from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”) to measure respondents’ agreement with statements regarding interest in participating in research (Likert, 1932). To ensure the validity of the survey instrument, a multi-step validation process was adopted. First, content and face validity were established through a rigorous review by a panel of academic experts in higher education research, ensuring that the questionnaire items accurately reflected the study’s objectives. Second, a pilot test was conducted with a small cohort of university students (n=30) to evaluate the clarity, readability, and formatting of the questions. Then, minor stylistic adjustments were made based on their feedback. Finally, the construct (Intrinsic & Extrinsic Drivers) validation was empirically supported by evaluating internal consistency via Cronbach’s Alpha, which yielded strong reliability coefficients.

The measurement scale demonstrated strong reliability, well exceeding the universally accepted threshold of 0.70. Specifically, the Intrinsic Motivation construct (comprising 3 items measuring student passion, networking interest, and societal contribution) demonstrated an alpha value of 0.784. Meanwhile, the Extrinsic Motivation construct (comprising 5 items assessing faculty guidance, environment, and institutional awards) showed a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.846 and the barriers construct demonstrated a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.686. These results confirm that the scales used are highly reliable and suitable for subsequent analyses.

Table 2. Reliability test of scales

Scale	No. of items	Cronbach’s Alpha(α)
Intrinsic Motivation	3	0.784
Extrinsic Motivation	5	0.846
Barriers	8	0.686

Source: Authors’ Survey (2026)

3.4 Data Analysis Strategy

For data analysis, a two-tier statistical strategy was adopted. First, Chi-square tests of Independence were conducted as an exploratory measure to assess the bivariate associations between demographic characteristics and students’ interest in participating in research. Karl Pearson’s chi-square test is among the most widely employed statistical techniques for investigating association and differences among categorical variables (Franke et al., 2012). However, to overcome the limitations of bivariate analysis and to evaluate the relative influence of different drivers and barriers, a multiple linear regression analysis was

subsequently performed. In this model, students' future interest in participating in research served as the dependent variable, while intrinsic and extrinsic factors functioned as the independent predictors.

To prepare the continuous predictors for the regression model, composite scores for both Intrinsic and Extrinsic Drivers were generated by calculating the mean values of their respective Likert-scale items. Furthermore, to ensure logical directionality and ease of interpretation within the regression framework, the binary dependent variables- students' future interest in pursuing research- were reverse-coded (where 1 = No and 2 = Yes). In this finalized model, the reverse-coded interest to research variable served as the dependent variable, while the computed mean scores of intrinsic and extrinsic factors functioned as the independent predictors.

4. RESULTS

The results section of this study is presented in three different segments: the demographic profile of the respondents, the drivers for research involvement, and the barriers hindering research activities among public university students.

Table 3. Demographic characteristics of the Respondents

Character	Frequency	n	Percentage
Gender	Male	130	54.9
	Female	107	45.1
Study Year	2nd	52	21.9
	3rd	89	37.6
	4th	78	32.9
	Masters	18	7.6
CGPA	3	22	9.3
	3.25	67	28.3
	3.5	102	43
	3.75	46	19.4
Faculty	Science	43	18.1
	Business	54	22.8
	Social Science	105	44.3
	Arts	35	14.8
Living Condition	Hall	184	77.6
	Mess	45	19
	Own-House/With Family	8	3.4
Participated in research	Yes	95	40.1
	No	142	59.9

Interest in participating in research	Yes	186	78.5
	No	51	21.5

Source: Authors' Survey (2026)

The study surveyed 237 students from different faculties of public universities in Bangladesh. The gender distribution is relatively balanced in this study. Among the participants, 54.9% (n=130) were male and 45.1% (n=107) were female. The majority of the participants were 3rd-year students (37.6%), followed by 4th-year students (32.9%). In terms of academic results, a remarkable proportion of the respondents (43%) maintained a CGPA of 3.5. Faculty-wise demographic information shows that the highest segment of the respondents belonged to the Social Science faculty (44.3%). Regarding research experience, although 78.5% expressed an interest in participating in research in the future, only 40.1% of the respondents got the opportunity to actively participate in research activities.

4.1 Drivers

This study identified several intrinsic and extrinsic factors that motivate students to participate in research activities. Chi-square tests were conducted to extract the relationships between these factors and actual research engagement.

Table 4. Intrinsic factors influencing research engagement

		Yes	No	P Value
Networking Benefits	Strongly Disagree	8	6	<0.001
	Disagree	12	4	
	Neutral	28	21	
	Agree	108	18	
	Strongly Agree	30	2	
Passionate about Research	Strongly Disagree	9	6	<0.001
	Disagree	3	13	
	Neutral	39	16	
	Agree	100	16	
	Strongly Agree	35	0	
Social Contribution	Strongly Disagree	7	5	<0.001
	Disagree	6	4	
	Neutral	32	22	
	Agree	105	20	

Strongly Agree	36	0
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Source: Authors' Survey (2026)

Table 4 displays the intrinsic factors. All three factors – Networking Benefits, Passion for Research, and Social Contribution – demonstrated statistically significant association with research interest ($p < 0.001$ for all). Among the 186 respondents expressing an interest in participating in research, 138 (74.2%) 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' that networking was a driver, 135 (72.6%) expressed a passion for research, and 141 (75.8%) identified social contribution as a motivator.

Table 5. Extrinsic factors influence research

		Yes	No	P Value
Awards and Recognition	Strongly Disagree	7	4	0.002
	Disagree	14	5	
	Neutral	28	17	
	Agree	94	23	
	Strongly Agree	43	2	
Research Resources	Strongly Disagree	9	5	0.005
	Disagree	11	4	
	Neutral	24	16	
	Agree	97	21	
	Strongly Agree	45	5	
Faculty supervision	Strongly Disagree	7	3	0.897
	Disagree	13	5	
	Neutral	37	10	
	Agree	94	25	
	Strongly Agree	35	8	

Source: Authors' Survey (2026)

Among the extrinsic factors, only 'Awards and Recognition' of their work ($p=0.002$) and availability of 'Research Resources' ($p=0.005$) showed statistically significant relationships with the research interest. However, no statistically significant association was observed between Faculty Supervision and research interest ($p=0.897$).

4.2 Barrier Factors

This section presents the findings of the Chi-square tests of independence conducted to identify the relationship between selected barrier factors and students' interest in participating in research (Yes/No). A total of six barrier factors were analyzed, including

institutional funding, heavy workload, lack of training, lack of technical skills, social expectations, and gender specific challenges.

Table 6. Barriers hindering research Participation

		Yes	No	P Value
Institutional Funding	Strongly Disagree	12	2	0.685
	Disagree	19	3	
	Neutral	31	7	
	Agree	66	19	
	Strongly Agree	58	20	
Heavy Workload	Strongly Disagree	5	6	<0.001
	Disagree	31	3	
	Neutral	47	25	
	Agree	72	11	
	Strongly Agree	31	6	
Lack of Training	Strongly Disagree	11	3	0.731
	Disagree	18	2	
	Neutral	39	13	
	Agree	85	23	
	Strongly Agree	33	10	
Limited Technical Skills	Strongly Disagree	28	5	<0.001
	Disagree	27	3	
	Neutral	42	13	
	Agree	75	14	
	Strongly Agree	14	16	
Social Expectations	Strongly Disagree	14	4	0.053
	Disagree	45	3	
	Neutral	53	21	
	Agree	59	17	
	Strongly Agree	15	6	
Gender-specific challenges	Strongly Disagree	16	8	0.182
	Disagree	43	6	
	Neutral	42	13	
	Agree	61	14	
	Strongly Agree	24	10	

Source: Authors' Survey (2026)

Table 6 represents the bivariate relationship analysis between six perceived barriers and research interest. No statistically significant associations were found for Institutional Funding ($p = 0.685$), Lack of Training ($p = 0.731$), Social Expectations ($p = 0.053$), and Gender-specific

Challenges ($p = 0.182$). In these instances, this distribution of responses was similar between those who were interested in participating in research and those who were not.

However, two barrier factors had a statistically significant association with research interest. Heavy Workload demonstrated a significant association ($p < 0.001$), where the highest frequency of 'Agree' responses $n=72$ was observed among students expressing an interest in engaging in research. Additionally, Limited Technical Skills showed a significant association with research interest ($p < 0.001$). Notably, among the 51 respondents who were not interested in participating in research, 31.4% ($n=16$) 'Strongly Agreed' that technical skills were a barrier, compared to 7.5% ($n = 14$) of the 186 students who were interested in participating.

4.3 Multivariate Predictors of Research Interest

To evaluate the relative influence of drivers and barriers simultaneously, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 233) = 16.538$, $p < .001$, accounting for 17.6% of the total variance in students' interest in research ($R^2 = .176$, Adjusted $R^2 = .165$).

Table 7 – Predictors of Research Interest

Variables	b	SE	β	t	p	95% CI	
						Lower	Upper
(Constant)	1.389	.156		8.885	< .001	1.081	1.697
Intrinsic Motivation	.211	.038	.426	5.549	< .001	.136	.286
Extrinsic Motivation	-.009	.04	-.018	-.229	.819	-.087	.069
Barriers	-.099	.039	-0.16	-2.545	.012	-.176	.022
R = .419, $R^2 = .176$, Adjusted $R^2 = .165$, $F(3,233) = 16.538$, $p = < .001$							
Note: b = Unstandardized Coefficient, SE = Standard Error, β = Standardized Beta, CI = Confidence Interval							

Source: Authors' Survey (2026)

As shown in Table 7, intrinsic motivation emerged as the strongest positive predictor of research interest ($\beta = .426$, $t = 5.549$, $p < .001$). Conversely, overall perceived barriers significantly and negatively influenced students' interest in research ($\beta = -.16$, $t = -2.545$, $p = .012$). Extrinsic motivation did not show any statistically significant multivariate relationship ($\beta = -.018$, $t = -.229$, $p < .819$).

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate a noticeable 'participation gap' among public university students in Bangladesh. While 78.5% of respondents of this study expressed a clear interest in participating in research, only 40.1% had actively participated in research

activities. Though there is high intrinsic motivation, systematic barriers prevent students from translating interest into participation. The demographic information of this study indicates engagement rate is most abundant among 3rd year and 4th year students. This may be due to increasing academic maturity and exposure to specialized courses. Intrinsic factors appear to be the most influential drivers; networking opportunities, a passion for new invention, and the desire to make a contribution to society all have a statistically significant influence on interest in pursuing a research career. Among extrinsic factors recognition of their work and available resources appeared to be a significant estimator of the research participation interest. But faculty supervision was not found to be a primary driver of research interest ($p = .897$); rather, perceived faculty support may function as a tool for execution instead of a prerequisite for motivation. In other words, interest in participating in research is often self-generated before institutional support is sought. In addition, the lack of a significant association for institutional funding ($p = .685$) may indicate that students are willing to participate in research in spite of having financial constraints. Another reason for these unexpected findings, students may not yet fully grasp the financial requirements of advanced scholarly work. This is further statistically validated by the multiple regression model, where intrinsic motivation emerged as the dominant positive driver, confirming that autonomous factors like passion and social commitment are the core engines shaping students' interest toward research.

The findings of this study, particularly the 'interest-participation gap' align with recent studies. For instance, Hasan et al. (2025) in their study reported that 70.8% of medical students in Bangladesh were interested in volunteering in research activities, but the actual participation rate was much lower, with the rate of 21.5%. Similarly, the findings for heavy academic workload as a major barrier factor ($p < 0.001$) mirror the findings by Ferdoush et al. (2021), where 89.1% of students cited academic overloads as their primary obstacle. In some prior studies, males were found 1.5 times more likely to be involved (Hasan et al., 2025), in this study, there is no significant relationship found between gender and research participation interest. This finding suggests that, though the interests are pretty equal, male students may get more priority in terms of the execution of the study.

This study has some limitations. The sample size ($n=237$) of this study is relatively small. The use of convenience sampling also restricts the generalizability of the findings, as the respondents may be more or less research-inclined than the average student. Data were only focused on public universities, which may not represent the overall condition of research engagement of students, excluding private universities, or specialized colleges and institutions. In addition, the reliance on self-reported data regarding CGPA and research participation may have biases. The cross-sectional nature of this study captures a snapshot of students' sentiment, but can't track the long-term progression of students from 'Interest' to 'completion' of research projects. Future studies could measure whether providing or including mandatory training on digital research tools like statistical software, office tools, significantly increases their involvement in research participation rates, since limited

technical skills are a primary deterrent. Further study could also collect qualitative interviews to identify the underlying causes of unexpected findings, such as faculty support, and gender difference did not drive research interest.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the major factors that foster or demotivate students' interest in research participation across public universities of Bangladesh. Overall, the study aimed to fill a critical literature gap by investigating both motivational and obstructive factors to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current research environment. The study shows that students' interest is often self-generated before institutional support is sought. However, extrinsic factors like recognition and availability of resources also have an influence on students' interest in participating in research. Conversely, regarding obstacles, heavy academic workloads and lack of technical skills were identified as the most critical barriers. This research might be helpful for universities and policymakers to improve the research culture in Bangladesh. Policymakers and university administrations should include relevant technical skills in their curriculum, re-evaluate academic workloads, and improve accessibility to resources.

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