

Taking horse to the pond: Applying Bourdieu's concepts in undergraduate student research

Sir,

I read your recent publication,^[1] which analyzed the attitudes, barriers, and practices toward research and publication among medical students, with great enthusiasm. I would like to extend my gratitude to the authors for rendering an exhaustive discussion on undergraduate student research. To me, indulging students in research is similar to taking a horse to the pond for drinking water. Unless the student has a certain degree of intrinsic motivation to gain research self-efficacy or vice versa (Bandura's social cognitive theory),^[2] faculty cannot make them pursue meticulous research endeavors. In addition, participation in research or publications is not given due consideration in developing countries such as India, which adopts objective questions-based postgraduate entrance examinations.

Within medical schools, the roles and responsibilities of students are diverse, and an average student would consider pursuing research as an additional academic endeavor rather than a career itself. Bourdieusian analyses include examination of the mission and political values of medical schools and how medical students are socialized to value competence over care.^[3] In other words, the "field" set by the medical schools determines the attitude of students toward research. If we apply Bourdieu's concepts^[4] of *capital* and *habitus*, operating synergistically in the field to create a professional *practice*, that is, undergraduate student research, we could visualize the barriers and practices toward research in a different perspective.

For undergraduate students, *social capital* in the form of network contacts and *cultural capital* in the form of external recognition accrued upon publications/presentations or academic standing serve as motivators for pursuing research. *Habitus* is dynamic and largely structured by both experiences and informal education.^[5] Thus, we can make out that these three factors should come together in determining the attitude of a student toward research. In terms of *practice* also, poorly delineated scope of activities, intangible rewards, and lack of confidence often tend to drain the enthusiasm of novice student-researcher.

Then, how should the esoteric act of pursuing research be perceived? Using Bourdieusian analyses, we can classify research into two types: One that generates new

knowledge for peer audience, that is, biomedical research. The other that encompasses research carried out for more practical purposes such as evaluating outpatient care in a clinical department.^[6] Students should be aware that research does not involve only laboratory, reagents, and procedures. Rather, it can include activities that aim at finding answers to a small issue popping up in day-to-day practice, and it is not always mandatory to keep an eye on the publications. It is the quest to pursue research that is applicable in the hospital or community settings. By understanding this basic difference, students can also circumvent one of the important perceived barriers whereby majority of students (57.5%) felt that research requires a lot of money.

In the present study,^[1] authors have evinced their concerns about the rejection of student research in prestigious journals. I would recommend that students should develop the habit of critical reading of articles published in the field of interest and write trainee-authored letters under the guidance of mentors. Also, it is not a difficult task to organize undergraduate student conferences for exclusive dissemination of the scientific findings. To conclude, our main aim should be on improving the students' research experience by fostering and supporting them with optimal motivation, engagement, and learning activities. Barriers can be surmounted with ease, if we have the strong cohesive will to achieve.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

Dinesh Kumar V.

Department of Anatomy, Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research, Puducherry, India

Address for correspondence: Dr. Dinesh Kumar V, Department of Anatomy, Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research, Puducherry, India. E-mail: dinesh.88560@gmail.com

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