Quality Assurance and Higher Education: The Scenario of Emerging Private Universities in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Bangladesh, along with other countries of the world, recognizes (higher) education as the major tool for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Throughout the world, university changes the society and remains the centre of change and development. However, education without quality can even be more dangerous than no education. In 1992, private universities have opened a new avenue in promoting the opportunities of higher education in Bangladesh and are also acting as an alternative to public universities. Though there is now no controversy regarding the necessity of private university, quality assurance is the greatest challenge that private universities especially the emerging universities face.

This paper is an attempt to investigate whether the private universities are offering quality education or not. The study also aims to scrutinize the factors that determine the quality of education. To explore the subject matter of the study a small-scale data has been collected through the form of questionnaire from 135 students and 30 teachers of 5 emerging private universities in Bangladesh.

The study identifies and examines that the levels of quality education of all these universities are not same. Most of them are trying utmost to ensure quality-providing necessaries but it will take time to reach up to a standard mark. It also reveals that quality faculties, rich library and lab facilities, classroom environment, infrastructural facilities and research environment are the main factors that determine quality higher education. At last based on findings, the researchers have put forward some pragmatic suggestions to overcome the existing barriers and challenges and thus ensure quality higher education.

Key terms: quality education; emerging universities; research and infrastructural opportunities

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Introduction

Earlier in Bangladesh, providing higher education was a sole responsibility shouldered by the state. But due to the increasing demand of the higher education, public universities failed to satisfy the overall demand of higher education in Bangladesh. Thus in 1992 private universities emerged to cope up with the expanded demand of higher education. Without private universities, national demand for higher education cannot be met. So both public and private universities must coexist to supplement and complement each other to reach the pinnacle of success in case of higher education.

It is universally acknowledged that the development of a modern society depends to a large extent on the nature and standard of higher education. Higher education has enormous potential to promote prosperity in the developing nations (Monem and Baniamin, 2010).Only when human resources are effectively developed, a nation can attain the capability to bring about positive social changes and much needed economic growth. To achieve our targeted sustainable development goals, there is no alternative to skilled and knowledgeable manpower. And only quality education can ensure expected level of human resource.

Sustainable development almost depends on the sustainable education of a country where quality higher education is considered as an effective tool of achieving sustainable development goals. There is no denying the fact of the necessity of private universities in Bangladesh as a substantial proportion of students study in 95 private universities at present for higher education. But efforts to impart quality education remains a challenge for the private universities especially the emerging ones.

It is really a praiseworthy, up to date and timely initiative that Bangladesh Ministry of Education and UGC have undertaken a project named Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP) that aims at improving the quality of teaching learning and research capabilities of higher education institutions (UGC, 2014). It is expected that the project will prove to be effective by the end of 2018.

Objectives of the Study

Objectives of this study have been divided into two categories- general and specific The general objective of the study is to explore the level of quality higher education of emerging private universities in Bangladesh and the specific objectives are-

1. To investigate the current scenario of emerging private universities in Bangladesh
2. To identify the major deficiencies and challenges faced by the private universities
3. To explore the infrastructural facilities of the private universities
4. To evaluate the teaching-learning environment as well as the quality of the teachers

5. To determine the research facilities for the faculty members and
6. To suggest areas of action that needs immediate attentions

Research Questions
The central research questions of this research is-
1. Whether the emerging private universities in Bangladesh are offering quality education or not?

Methodology
Data Collection
This research is qualitative and quantitative in nature. Primary data has been collected randomly from 135 students and 30 teachers of five private universities. While selecting Sample Universities, the researchers consider those universities that were established after 2010 and which are located neighboring and convenient to the researchers' perspective. The opportunity of having personal contact with the faculty members of those universities accelerated the motivation of the researchers to pick up them. To collect data the researchers were physically there or sent courier based on the locations of the universities. The researchers also took help from the secondary sources including internet, journals, magazines, Annual Reports of UGC, different seminar papers etc.

Sampling
Primary data has been collected from five emerging private universities in Bangladesh as listed below:

Name of the Institutions	No. of Participants	
	Students	Teachers
Feni University, Feni	35	10
Britannia University, Comilla	25	5
CCN University of Science and Technology, Comilla	25	5
Bangladesh Army University of Science and Technology (BAUST), Comilla	25	5
Cox'x Bazar International University, Cox's Bazar	25	5
Total	135	30

Survey
In order to bear out plausible and justified result, the researchers set two set of questionnaires, one for the teachers and the other for the students. Out of 27 questions, 12 are set for students and the rest (15) are for teachers. The researchers set various forms of questions like dichotomous questions, multiple questions with four points, multiple questions with five points and also open ended questions on the basis of the

nature of questions. Sometimes questions for students and teachers are same depending on their relevance. The questionnaires are based on the central research questions and objectives of the research.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, required tables are prepared, and result of the close ended questions is presented in percentile method whereas open ended questions are analyzed in descriptive way. Students' and teachers' responses were analyzed separately. The researchers also attempted to answer the research questions in this section. The individual identities of the respondents were hidden as per commitment in questionnaires form.

Literature Review

There are a large number of studies, reports and theoretical works on quality higher education in Bangladesh even on quality education in private universities but there is hardly any research on the quality of emerging private universities in Bangladesh.

According to Oxford Dictionary (2003), quality refers to "the degree of excellence of a thing". In broader sense, quality education refers to the significant changes in the educational system itself, in the nature of its inputs, objectives, curricula and educational technologies; and its socioeconomic, cultural and political environment (Ashraf, Ibrahim and Joardar, 2009).

One great barrier of assuring quality education in private universities is their failure to attract the quality students like public university (Andaleeb, 2003). UGC (2014) in its report expressed concern about the quality of higher education that most of the private universities have no quality teachers, fulltime faculties, updated curriculum, infrastructure facilities, libraries, teaching aids etc. Most of the universities of Bangladesh do not have rich library and other facilities good enough to cater to the need of the students. Reference books and relevant foreign journals containing the latest information are hardly available in the library of these universities (Huda et al. 2010).

Barai et al. (2015) are in the opinion that the well-meaning curricula may not produce good results if the university doesn't or cannot hire and retain adequately qualified, experienced and committed teachers to conduct the courses. As most of the private universities follow American system, one examiner namely the course teacher is the single and final assessor. One great disadvantage is that a particular student may be favored but the private universities are still overlooking the facts (Barai et al. 2015).

Ranjan (2014) firmly states that research is part of higher education but it is a

neglected issue in private university. There is no established culture for research here. Authorities have no initiative and budget allocation for this. Yet some faculties are doing research on their own initiatives for their academic and professional developments. Bangladesh is perhaps the only country in the world where private universities do not get any support (scholarship, research fund, campus facilities etc.) from the government.

Jewel (2013) identified that up to date curriculum, English medium instruction, abundant use of technology, emphasis on computer and communication skills, practical approaches of teaching, free session jam, continuous assessment are the key tools that drive to boost up the standard of education in private universities. Jamal (2002) argued that despite many shortcomings private universities provide a global flavor to their students. Some of their facilities are of very high standard. He further argued that though at high cost private universities in Bangladesh definitely have contribution in human resource development.

The study of Alam, Haque and Siddique (2007) reveals that it is urgently needed to introduce quality control mechanism in private universities. Sarkar, Rana and Zitu (2013) studied that teaching profession must be made more attractive through offering separate salary structure so that talented and bright students with high academic and research background come in this profession. Teachers should be evaluated on the basis of their academic result, teaching quality, research and publication.

Methods of teaching through lectures will have to subordinate to the methods that will lay stress on self-study, personal consultation between teachers and pupils, and dynamic sessions of seminars and workshops etc. (Chahal, 2015). He also further emphasizes that only attracting qualified teachers may not improve the quality of education. There must be continuous effort to develop these recruited through regular trainings and development programs (Mannan, 2015).

Chowdhury (2016) opines, "If we compare the per student operation cost of private universities and public universities, we'd find that there is not much of a difference. The only difference is that students of public universities are enjoying free education while this advantage is not made available to students of private universities".

Data Analysis and Discussion
  Student questionnaire:
Students' questionnaire consists of 12 close-ended questions including dichotomous questions, and multiple questions with four points. The total number of respondents here is 136.

Table 01: Students Facilities

No	Questions	Yes		No	
		R	P	R	P
01	Did you get admitted in your university through admission test?	90	66.67	01	33.33
02	Do you have any opportunity of scholarship or waiver on the basis of your academic result of the university?	63	46.67	02	53.33
03	Do you have different clubs (languages club/debating club/ cultural club/ sports club) in your university?	78	57.78	03	42.22
04	Is your website informative and updated?	62	45.93	04	54.07

❖ **R** stands for respondents and **P** for percentage

Table-1 reveals that a significant number of students (66.67%) get admitted in private universities through admission test but 53.33% report that they don't get opportunity of scholarship or waiver on the basis of academic result in university.
The table also discloses that 57.78% students can enjoy club activities and 54.07% respond that their website is not enough informative and updated

Table 02: Teachers Quality and Class Room Environment

No	Question	Always		Sometimes		Very little		Never	
		R	P	R	P	R	P	R	P
05	How often do your teachers conduct classes in English?	72	53.33	53	39.26	10	07.41	72	53.33
06	How much are you satisfied with the performance of your teachers?	74	54.81	54	40.00	07	05.19	74	54.81
07	How often do your teachers use technological devices in the classroom?	42	31.11	62	45.93	30	22.22	42	31.11
08	How much do you have access to smooth internet facility?	40	29.63	58	42.96	25	18.52	40	29.63
09	How much are your classrooms adequate and well-equipped?	44	32.59	43	31.85	35	25.93	44	32.59
10	How often do you visit any institution/industry/ bank/ company as a part of your study?	18	13.33	23	17.04	25	18.52	18	13.33

❖R stands for respondents and P for percentage

In Table-2 we can observe that most of the respondents (53.33%) opine that their

teachers always conduct class in English and 54.81% students are always satisfied with the performance of teachers, and more surprisingly 99.26% teachers more or less use modern teaching aids.

Table also shows that 99.11% students have more or less access to smooth internet facility whereas 90.37% reply that their classes are more or less adequate and well-equipped. But a good number of students (51.11%) respond that they never visit any institution or industry or bank as part of their study.

Table 03: Other Required Facilities

No	Question	Highly Satisfactory		Sometimes		Slightly Satisfactory		Dissatisfactory	
		R	P	R	P	R	P	R	P
11	How is your tuition fee?	0	0	66	48.89	29	21.48	0	0
12	How is your library and lab facility?	10	7.41	15	11.11	40	29.63	10	7.41

❖   **R** stands for respondents and **P** for percentage

Table-3 shows that a significant amount of students(70.37%) are more or less satisfied with rate of tuition fee whereas (51.85%) are dissatisfied with library and lab facilities provided by their universities.

Teacher Questionnaire:

Teachers' questionnaire consists of 15 questions including close ended questions, open ended questions, dichotomous questions, and multiple questions with four and five points. The total number of respondents is 30.

Table 04: Research and Financial Facilities

No	Questions	Yes		No	
		R	P	R	P
01	Do you get any fund for research from your university?	08	26.67	22	73.33
02	Do you have the opportunity of study leave for higher education?	13	43.33	17	56.67
03	Is there any quality assurance cell or center in your university?	07	23.33	23	76.67
04	Do you get remuneration for setting up questions, invigilation, evaluation of answer scripts etc.?	09	30	21	70
05	Are the answer scripts of the students evaluated by the second examiner or external?	08	26.67	22	73.33

❖**R** stands for respondents and **P** for percentage

Table-4 exposes that a good number of teachers (73.33%) don't get fund for research but only 36.67% teachers get study leave for higher education. Only 23.33% universities have quality assurance cell.

Besides, a greatest proportion (70%) doesn't get any remuneration for setting up questions, invigilation, evaluation of answer scripts etc. whereas only 26.67% teachers

reply that their answer scripts are evaluated by the second examiner or external.

Table 05: Teaching Environment and Training Facilities

No	Question	Always		Sometimes		Neutral		Hardly		Never	
		R	P	R	P	R	P	R	P	R	P
06	How often do you conduct classes in English?	16	53.33	11	36.67	3	10	0	0	0	0
07	How often do you use modern teaching aids in the classroom?	12	40	18	60	0	0	0	0	0	0
08	How often does your university arrange workshop, seminar, conference etc.?	09	30	21	70	0	0	0	0	0	0
09	How much do you get support and fund for joining seminar (national/international)?	0	0.3	09	30	04	13.33	03	10	14	46.67

❖**R** stands for respondents and **P** for percentage

According to table-5, 53.33% teachers always conduct class in English and 100% teachers more or less use modern teaching aids in the classroom.

70% respondents opine that workshops, seminars and conferences are arranged sometimes where 30% reply they are held regularly. On question of getting support and fund, 46.67% are in the opinion that they never get any support or fund.

Table 06: Students Quality and Standard of Education

No	Question	Highly Satisfactory		Satisfactory		Neutral		Slightly Satisfactory		Dissatisfactory	
		R	P	R	P	R	P	R	P	R	P
10	What's the quality of students while getting admitted in university?	0	0	07	23.33	05	16.67	15	0	0	07
11	How is your students' language skill?	0	0	12	40	04	13.33	11	0	0	12
12	How much are you satisfied with your honorarium?	0	0	18	60	04	13.33	06	0	0	18
13	How's the standard of education in Private universities?	0	0	16	53.33	06	20	06	0	0	16

❖**R** stands for respondents and **P** for percentage

Table -6 indicates that 50% respondents opine that the quality of students while getting admitted is slightly satisfactory and only 40% of the teachers are satisfied with their language skills.

It is also observed that a significant number of teachers (60%) are satisfied with their honorarium. Regarding the quality education in private universities, 73.33% are more or less satisfied with the standard of education.

Q. No. 14) Major weakness you have observed in private university
30 teachers pointed out total 39 weaknesses .The major weaknesses are mentioned here only.
- a) There is limited opportunity to get practical knowledge from lab (Al Mamun Khan, lecturer, Feni University).
- b) There is no freedom of teachers and no job security and extreme workload (Md. Abul Khayer , an inveterate and senior lecturer , Feni University).
- c) Lack of proper trainings, facilities for faculties, permanent campus etc. (Maruf Ahmed, lecturer, Britannia University).
- d) Students' poor command over English (Motiur Rahman , professor, Britannia University).
- e) No or mere admission test in order to get students (Md. Tariqul Alam, assistant professor, Britannia University).
- f) Students hardly try to understand, they just want to get marks in the examination (Md. Khorsedul Alam, senior lecturer, Cox's Bazar International University).
- g) Failure to attract quality/qualified students(Hafeza Khatun Tani, lecturer, CCN University of Science and Technology).
- h) Four month semester is too short to cover the syllabus (Md. Monir Hossain, lecturer, CCN University of Science and Technology).
- i) Scarcity of senior and experienced teachers (Md. Shahriar Mahmud Anik, lecturer, Bangladesh Army International University of Science and Technology).

Q. No. 15) Your suggestions to improve the quality of education in private university
30 teachers put forward total 35 suggestions .On the basis of their teaching experiences the major opinions are sated here only.
- a) Every university has to ensure permanent campus for proper educational environment (Hasan Ahmad, lecturer, Feni University).
- b) There should have much scope of achieving practical knowledge(Sharmin Sultana, lecturer, Feni University).
- c) Six months semester would be favorable instead of four months (Md. Abul Khayer , an inveterate and senior lecturer , Feni University).
- d) Emphasis on crash programs to improve command over English(Hafeza Khatun Tani, lecturer, CCN University of Science and Technology).

e) Admission process should be improved to admit brilliant students (Md. Monir Hossain, lecturer, CCN University of Science and Technology).

f) Senior teachers should be appointed to ensure quality education(Md. Shahriar Mahmud Anik, lecturer, Bangladesh Army International University of Science and Technology).

g) Better working environment, job security and satisfaction must be ensured to the teachers (Sabrina Mannan, senior lecturer, Britannia University).

h) Should provide proper facilities desired by faculty members in order to reduce switching nature (Trina Saha,lecturer, Britannia University).

i) Creating positive perceptions of all types of people's guardian and students about private university (Sangita Basak,lecturer, Britannia University).

j) Various professional trainings, workshops should be arranged in regular basis (Mohammad Ishtiyak, lecturer, Cox's Bazar International University).

Discussion

1. A good number of students get admitted through admission test which is a positive sign towards the quality education and they can also enjoy the club facilities; and their website is informative and updated but they have limited opportunities of getting scholarship or waiver on the basis of their academic results in university. (See table 1)

2. From the students' response, it is noticed that most of the teachers prefer to conduct classes in English and use modern technological devices in the classroom, which is in harmony with the latest teaching approach. Besides, their classrooms are adequate and well-equipped but most of the universities are not conscious enough to arrange any tour as a part of their study.(See table 2)

3. From students' responses, it is clear that the infrastructure facilities like library and lab facilities are not up to the mark but universities try to ensure smooth internet facility.(See table 3)

4. It is also found that workshops, seminars and conferences are arranged sometimes though not in regular basis. Most of the universities are reluctant to provide fund for research, higher studies, joining national and international seminar. (See table 5)

5. In most of the cases the answer scripts of the students are not evaluated by the second examiner or external and most of the teachers also do not get remuneration for setting up questions, invigilation, evaluation of answer scripts etc. (See table 4)

6. Very few universities have congenial research environment and they have no established research cell or center which is not in harmony with the nature of university education. (See table 4)

7. Teachers are slightly satisfied with the quality of the students when they get

admitted and also with their language skills in the classroom. (See table 6)

8. It is a positive sign that a significant number of teachers are almost satisfied with the honorarium, and the standard of education provided by the private universities. (See table 6)

Recommendations

Government and UGC:

1. UGC can provide necessary fund to the researchers like public universities.
2. The govt. should remove the tax burden on private universities and reward the good universities.
3. UGC should have right to send a nominee at the time of recruitment of faculties.
4. A unified service and teacher requirement rules should be formulated.
5. Establishment of teacher training center for the tertiary level teachers like primary, secondary and higher secondary level.
6. National debate can be arranged with various stakeholders before finalizing any act.

Authority of the University:

1. University can borrow expertise and share resources among public and private universities of home and abroad.
2. Six months semester would be favorable instead of four months.
3. Should enhance the number of faculty members emphasizing on the appointment of senior and experienced faculties as permanent basis.
4. No student should be admitted without proper screening or admission test and university should not charge unbearable charge from them.
5. University should ensure permanent campus, canteen, playground, club activities, job fair, career counseling etc.
6. University should attract talented and bright students in teaching through high salary and other financial benefits.
7. Should attract the bright students providing waiver, scholarship, free hostel facility etc.
8. Can provide desired facilities to the faculty members in order to reduce the rate of job switching.
9. University should ensure remuneration for setting up questions, invigilation, evaluation of answer scripts etc.
10. University can ensure subject wise training for the skill development of the faculty members.

Infrastructure:

1. There should have access to online subscription for searching books, reading materials, research papers etc. in the library.
2. There should have photocopy facility, enough seating arrangement, quiet and comfortable reading room in library.

3. There should have access to borrow books from library for a whole semester.
4. Should provide necessary equipment for sports and cultural activities.

Classroom and Teaching Environment:

1. Case based studies should be ensured to make student competent to understand real life situation.
2. Participatory and learner autonomy based teaching should be practiced and promoted.
3. English should strictly be followed as a medium of instruction in the classroom.
4. There should have a number of multi-media projectors, audio-visual aids in the classrooms.
5. Answer script should be evaluated at least by two teachers of same or other university.
6. Should emphasis on crash programs to improve command over English.

Research Opportunities:

1. Private university must create proper research environment for the faculties as well as students.
2. There should have a yearly budget for research activities.
3. Every university should have a research cell or centre for publication of journals, organizing seminars, workshops etc.
4. University should provide motivation and financial benefits for the researchers.

Limitations and Scopes for Further Research

This research paper suffers from some obvious shortcomings. The quality of the paper would have been improved if the data could be collected through the form of interview including questionnaire from all the emerging private universities in Bangladesh. In spite of, it is expected that this paper will contribute lots to enhance the quality of tertiary education especially in private universities in Bangladesh.

A further study should be carried out covering all the existing emerging private universities in Bangladesh to bring into light the real scenario of the universities. Moreover, a comparative study could have been conducted between emerging private universities and established private universities to be acquainted with the deficiencies and challenges of emerging universities in order to ensure quality higher education.

Conclusion

"No quality, no education" should be the basic premise to be followed in Bangladesh in order to face the challenges of sustainable development goals and thus bring about a successful implementation of SDGs like MDGs.

In this paper the researchers made utmost attempt to shed light on the overall scenario of emerging private universities in Bangladesh and came to a conclusion that in spite of relentless and continuous effort with having limited resources and insufficient facilities, they are committed to impart quality higher education but quality has not yet

achieved at the desired level.

The finding of this paper indicates that universities should put more emphasis on research and training opportunities for teachers, appointment of senior teachers, attracting the bright students, enhancing the infrastructural facilities, linkage with the fieldwork etc.

As there is no denying fact regarding the necessity of private universities, so an all-out effort is highly imperative to develop the overall quality of the private universities. If Bangladesh really expects to become a middle-income country by 2021, there is no alternative to improve the quality of education.

The researchers hold firm opinion that this study will open the eyes of the policy makers especially the authority of the universities and thus attempt to facilitate and promote the necessaries to enhance the quality of higher education in Bangladesh.

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