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PRIVATE INITIATIVES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE TRENDS

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Abstract: The "privatization" of higher education is by all accounts a global phenomenon. Very few systematic studies of these new trends in private post secondary education exist to date, although the impact of this development could be far-reaching not only for higher education but also for the social and economic development of many societies in the world. The need for the private sectors' (non-profit, philanthropic) role in higher education was appreciated by the 1980's Government of our country. Private education in Bangladesh is getting more competitive with the remarkable increase in the number of academic institutions in the country. The ineluctable forces of globalization in this new millennium make this growth path more complex and challenging. The study concludes that, in general, the cost of education in private universities in Bangladesh is some what expensive due to the imbalance between increasing tuition fees and an increasing amount of financial aid and scholarships.

Introduction

The history of modern higher education in Bangladesh may be traced back to the establishment of Dhaka University in 1921. The establishment of Dhaka University was considered an imperial concession made to appease the adverse feelings of the Muslim middle class of East-Bengal following the annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911, which resulted from the movement of protest led by the more privileged Hindu Community. Quite of few post Secondary Schools and Colleges existed before the establishment of Dhaka University. However, entry and education in these schools and colleges were often limited to middle class or the upper middle class children while children from lower income or lower middle class background often could not enter the educational institutions imparting even basic primary

education. Parents and guardians either could not afford to send their children to school or thought it more wise to engage their children in helping them in their profession, mostly as agricultural labours. Practically all school were established by the wealthy 'Zemindars' (the land owners) and were founded on religious practices. Lessons on the matters relating on religious belief, mostly Hinduism and Islam were given priority. The teaching method encouraged memorizing and there were no room for creative learning or thinking.

After Sepoy Muting, the White Ruling class believed the separation of the general people from the rulers should be narrowed and institutional facilities should be provided to the people in different spheres of their life, education being an important one. Depending upon these thinking University of Calcutta was established in 1857. Before the establishment of Calcutta University there were a few intermediate colleges in East Bengal. Later most of such colleges were upgraded as degree colleges and affiliated with Calcutta University, Viz : Chittagong College in 1869, BM College in Barishal in 1884, Sylhet MC College in 1892. When the partition of India took place in 1947 practically all major districts in Bengal had a higher secondary school and college and side by side with other religious schools.

End of Cold-War resulted from the collapse of communism and the spread of free market ideas in the former Soviet Union, China and nations in the Eastern Europe has brought about many dramatic and momentous changes on the world scene. One remarkable development is the emergence of new institutions of higher learning in the private sector of previously command economies and also in many developing countries that had been wedded to a culture of socialism for decades. The "privatization" of higher education is by all accounts a global phenomenon. Very few systematic studies of these new trends in private post secondary education exist to date, although the impact of this development could be far-reaching not only for higher education but also for the social and economic development of many societies in the world.

Private higher education in Bangladesh : The beginning

The need for the private sectors' (non-profit, philanthropic) role in higher education was appreciated by the Government of President Ziaur Rahman in the 1980s. The Ziaur Rahman Government started dialogue with the potential pioneering people who wanted to build private universities or centers of excellence for higher education in the private sector. Due to this socio- political problem in the optimal functioning / performance of the Public universities, the government in 1980 was contemplating to encourage social thinkers/ potential organizers to found private (mainly non-profit) universities. A military coup in May 1981 stalled the dialogue between the government

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and the potential entrepreneurs of private universities in the beginning of the decade. President Ziaur Rahman was killed by the coup in May 1981.

In 1988 and afterwards, individual initiatives were made to set up two medical colleges, one in Dhaka and another in Chittagong. Plans for establishing general universities in the private sector were made by the sponsors of North-South University in Dhaka in 1988-1989. The North-South University project was a brain-child of Mr. Muslehuddin Ahmed, a former Secretary and Ambassador of GoB. He discussed the idea with a group of businessmen and intellectuals. They accepted the idea and the 30-member Foundation for Promotion of Education and Research was formed in May 1990. FPER was registered as a non-profit organization under the Societies Act 1860. Although private universities existed in other countries for long, the first private university in Bangladesh did not make its appearance till 1992. With the approval of 'Private University Act 1992' by the parliament, the door was opened for a new system of higher education in Bangladesh. On 5 November 1992, the government approved the establishment of North South University and it was granted the charter to offer degree level courses. The then Prime Minister Begum Khalida Zia formally inaugurated North South University on 10 February 1993 with 143 students. Mr. Muslehuddin Ahmed was the first President of the University. FPER, the founder of North South University, was later renamed as the North South University Foundation and Mr. Iftekherul Alam, a business leader, was the founding Chairman of the foundation. Within a year or two, four to five new universities were set up. USTC, IUB, DIU and IUBAT followed North South University. Today the country has 56 such private universities.

The promoters of private universities in Bangladesh can be classified into six categories

- a) Retired bureaucrats
- b) Successful businessmen
- c) Senior academicians
- d) Active / retired politicians
- e) NGOs
- f) Combination of some of the above.

There are private universities of another category operating in Bangladesh; they are the Bangladesh campuses of some low profile overseas private universities and colleges.

The creation of private universities can be thought of as the outcome of the trend of growing number of students leaving the country in the eighties. The primary reasons were the inability of the public universities in providing enough seats to admission seekers and the frequent political unrest and campus problems resulting in unscheduled closure of universities which prolonged academic sessions.

Education in private universities is expensive as these universities do not receive any financial support from the government but are heavily taxed. They have to bear the entire recurring and development expenditure from the fees received from the students. The courses offered in practically all private universities are job focused as learners would like to have some sort of assurance that they will be able to recover their high educational expenses once they graduated from a private university.

Most of the private universities in Bangladesh follow the US model of higher education with four-year bachelor degrees, a credit-hour system and a similar academic calendar.

Private universities offer a variety of courses and charge differing tuition fees, although all private sector costs are significantly higher than the costs of studying in the public sector. Tuition fees are high compared to the average per capita income of \$350 per year. However, the majority of courses are priced for the growing middle classes, at between \$1000 and \$4000, which has raised accusations of social elitism. The social elitism is accepted in Bangladesh, as higher education is perceived to benefit the individual rather than the taxpayer. All private universities teach in English, which limits enrolment due to poor standard in English amongst much of the population, due to the Bangla Language policy in the schools system.

The curricula in Private universities reflect the type of courses that are most valuable to students, e.g. internationally marketable courses such as Business Administration, Computer Science, Engineering, and Medicine that public universities are unable to offer in sufficient quantities. They also offer other innovative courses relevant to the particular Bangladeshi context including disaster management, physiotherapy, and textile engineering. The introduction of vocationally based courses is challenging public universities to restructure their curricula in order to compete, although the public sector offers pure sciences and engineering courses that are not generally available in the private sector, so there is an element of complementarity.

Qualification in the higher education system

The main languages of instruction are Bangla and English. (Figure 1)

	Qualification	Type	Requirement	From	Study time
a	Bachelor's Degree (Honours)	University- 1st stage	HSC	Universities	4- Years
b	Bachelor's Degree (Second Degree)	do	Bachelor's Degree (Pass)	University Colleges	2-years +
c	Master's Degree	University - 2nd stage	Bachelor's Degree (Hons)	Do	1- Year
d	Master of Philosophy (M. Phil)	University- 3rd stage	Master's Degree	University	2- Years
e	Doctor's Degree	University -3rd stage	Master's degree/M. Phil	Do	3-years

Financing Arrangements

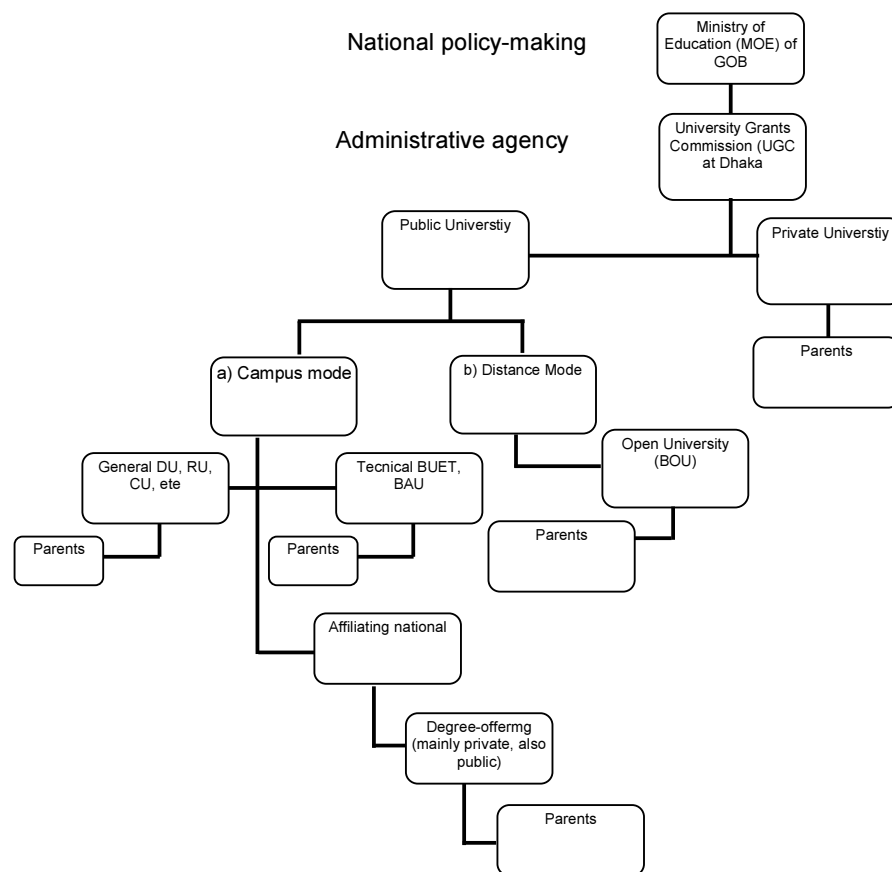
The private universities started functioning with limited capital funds, in hired premises and with part-time faculty from public universities. In the early years, there was no plan for building campuses and no plan to raise capital funds for that purpose was made.

The initial success of the private universities to finance their current operation through the collection of fees and charges from students and generate large surpluses left them somewhat myopic about long-term requirements for capital funds. Although they are supposed to move to their own campus after 7 years of establishment, on condition 12 years after, according to the Private University Act Amendment 2010.

It may be mentioned that private universities are capable of saving roughly 40 to 50 percent of their earnings from students. The implication of high fees charged by private universities to generate large surplus may be serious for their long-term growth. These universities have been attracting students mainly from the rich families who fail to get places in public universities. It is generally known that DU, BUET and medical colleges admit most of the top students that pass the HSC/ equivalent public exams. The rest get places in other public and private universities, depending on their financial status. The result is that bright students in public universities do not get quality education as they suffer from session jams extending for three to four years mostly at public cost. On the other hand students from the wealthy families and with lower academic credentials are registering in private universities of high cost, most of which are not offering quality education.

Management and Administrative control of higher Education

Organization of the higher education sub-sector in Bangladesh takes into account this reality of the emerging private sector. Figure 2 presents a graphic picture showing how tertiary-level education in Bangladesh is organized.



Clientele-level (Parents/Students)

The Ministry of Education (MOE) is the apex policy-making body in Bangladesh. The University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh is the main administrative agency headed by a Chairman (with help of other 5 members) to regulate and co-ordinate plans and programs of different public and private Universities.

The private University stream of tertiary education in the country whether an institution offering a degree, first degree or beyond—has to be accountable ultimately to UGC. Formally, UGC defines a number of administrative, financial and other parameters to these universities. The universities have

autonomy (by the parliamentary acts) to work within the UGC given parameters. Quality assurance, equivalency and other similar aspects are supposed to be taken care of by UGC.

The University Grants Commission of Bangladesh (UGC) established in 1973, acts as an intermediary body between the government and individual universities, and is responsible for all higher education. It reports to the Minister of Education through the Secretary of Education its main functions are as follows:

1. To assess the needs of university education and evaluate and recommend development plans to the Ministry.
2. To identify the financial requirements of the Universities.
3. To allocate operating and development funds from the government to the various institutions.
4. To evaluate the use of funds and implementation of development programs.
5. To advise the government on the establishment of new universities, including private universities, and expansion of existing institutions.
6. To collect and disseminate statistical information.
7. To advise the government on proposals to grant the right to confer special degree awarding status on colleges.

Private University Amendment Act 2010

According to the Private University Amendment Act 2010, a private university should have the following authorities:

- a) Board of Trustees
- b) Syndicate
- c) Academic Council
- d) Faculty
- e) Institute
- f) Course- curricula committee
- g) Finance committee
- h) Teaching staff appointment committee and
- i) Disciplinary committee.

The following officials will remain as full - time staff of a private University.

- i) Vice-Chancellor ii) Pro-Vice Chancellor iii) Treasurer iv) Controller of Examinations v) Deans / Directors (vi) Registrar (vii) Proctor (viii) Departmental Heads (ix) Advisor (Student Affairs) (x) Director, Finance (xi) Public Relations Officer (xii) Librarian.

The Chancellor

Honorable President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh will be the Chancellor of all private universities. The chancellor will appoint the Vice-Chancellor, the Pro-Vice Chancellor and the Treasurer of a private University for a 4-years period.

- ii) He will confer the degrees to the candidates through a program named convocation ceremony as the chairman of the program.
- iii) Each and every degree to be conferred to the students should have prior approval of the Chancellor.
- iv) Under prior approval of the Chancellor convocation ceremony will be observed in every year or as advised by the Chancellor.
- v) Education Ministry will act as the secretariat of the Chancellor.

Regulation of quality control measures

As of today, there is no body to regulate private universities and assure the quality of education, other than the weak supervision of UGC. Since private universities receive no funding from the UGC, there is little that the UGC can do other than report some facts for the government. The Ministry of Education is the ultimate authority to institutionalize quality control measures if there are to be any. The UGC and the Government, of course, exercise little control over the quality of education in private Universities. Assurance of quality in university education has been left with the universities themselves. In turn, with a particular private university, certain bodies such as the Academic council merely process ongoing activities such as admitting students, approving courses and panels of examiners, opening new departments, sanctioning additional teaching posts etc.

Quality control of higher education at a private university mainly involves the following:

- i) Quality of inputs : Selection of students
- ii) Quality of processing of inputs to final products

Quality of inputs

Selection of Students: - As mentioned earlier, private universities in general are not attracting top-quality students, although all of them apply some form of admission tests of their own. Despite a sharp decline in quality, public universities are still the first choice by all admission seekers. For example, Dhaka University admits less than 10 per cent of the students applying for about 5,000 places. This factor alone puts DU into a relatively higher position among other universities. DU admits the top students, after BUET and the medical colleges.

High fees charged by the private universities may be one of the reasons for not attracting bright students. These universities are yet not get general recognition for the education being imparted, although many degree colleges and some university colleges have been in place for a long time in the private sector. Newness aside, private universities are not offering courses in natural sciences such as physics, chemistry and biology, etc., and most other courses in the social sciences. Excepting one, all of them began offering courses in business administration and computer science in view of the potential demand for those programs.

In terms of the processing of students, all private universities have adopted the American course and semester/term systems and the continuous system of evaluation by course teachers resulting in letter grades and GPA. The curriculum is also drawn up according to what is followed by American universities, excepting IUC and DIU. These two private universities have included some courses on Islamic knowledge and practices as may be found in Arab Countries. All private universities have introduced term/semester systems to offer courses of certain credit hours by US standards. For example, the BBA program requires the completion of at least 40 courses of 120 credit hours. Unlike in public universities, students are given the flexibility to take courses according to their abilities. That is, a student may be allowed to take two courses to remain in the program when a full load may be five courses. This has allowed many students with poor performance to continue in the program for a longer period. There are also allegations of grade inflation in some of the weaker private universities. This is expected because during the initial years many private universities admitted students without sufficient testing. Excepting NSU, BRAC, EWU the practice may still be going on in other private universities.

Quality of processing of inputs to final products

An important issue in the processing of students is the supply of trained teachers, books and equipment relevant to the courses and method of delivery used in classrooms. The physical condition of the classroom is also important. The general physical condition of classrooms, libraries, and computer centers are much better in private universities. Most of the classroom facilities are air-conditioned and fitted with audiovisual equipment. Multimedia is used by some of the teachers trained abroad. As mentioned earlier, the supply of qualified teachers is limited in Bangladesh. Although foreign trained teachers are sought and preferred by the private universities, perhaps NSU has most maintained that

practice so far. It does not allow teachers without a PhD to teach in the Master's program, such as the MBA, and no one without a Master's degree from the USA, UK, Canada or Australia is recruited as a lecturer. It has also established a tenure track system for recruitment at higher ranks.

NSU, BRAC, EWU, IIUC, USTC and a few others began developing a library and a computer laboratory right from the beginning. NSU has a strong collection of foreign journals in its library. Text books on most subjects are available in the local market from Indian sources. Cheaper editions of most of the American books are bought by the students. The photocopying of unavailable books is rampant, ignoring all kinds of restrictions from publishers.

The conclusion on quality assurance in higher education in Bangladesh is that UGC has a role in setting certain minimum qualifications for recruiting teachers in general for both public and private universities. However, it lacks the ability to exercise such control due to politicized campuses and the weak structure of UGC. Individual institutions are left to assure the quality of education and research. Private universities do try to monitor and evaluate teachers and quality of instruction through students' reports and supervision by Heads of departments. However, private universities generally do not admit brighter students, although some of them are showing strengths in developing students' potential by trained and motivated teachers and better support services. The lack of highly qualified teachers is posing a threat to the quality and expansion of private universities, as they are currently dependent on part-time teachers. Research is not on the agenda in private universities. Public universities lack funding for research and the low pay of teachers encourages them to undertake income-supplementing jobs, such as consulting for government departments, NGOs and donor agencies, and part-time teaching in private universities. Hence, quality control issues in higher education are seriously neglected in both public and private Universities in Bangladesh. Almost all private universities (with few exceptions) are founded on rented space and buildings, campus facilities such as academically suitable building infrastructure, extensive library facilities, dormitory facilities, canteen facility, sports and recreational facilities, computer laboratories with high speed internet access and transport systems are extremely limited

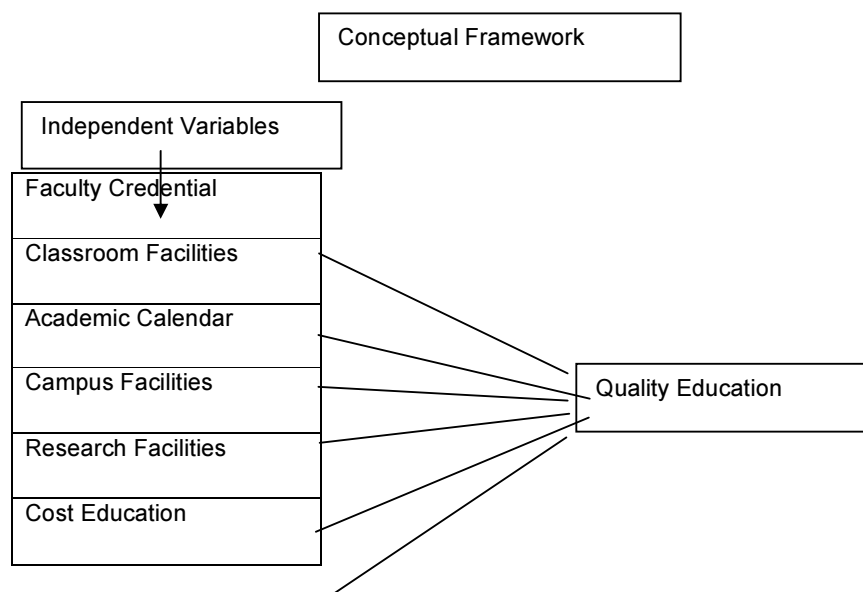


Figure 3: Conceptual framework for quality education at private universities in Bangladesh.

This factor influences the overall learning of the students, which affects the quality of their education. In a similar fashion, research facilities are also underdeveloped. Most of the universities do not have research bureaus, and publication facilities are also limited, as indicated by the fact that only four or five journals are published among more than 50 private universities in Bangladesh. Due to the lack of adequate reference materials in the libraries, the teachers and the students face enormous problems. Clearly the variable of campus facilities has an important impact on the overall quality of education in these higher learning centers of Bangladesh.

Growth Pattern of Private Universities in Bangladesh

The spectacular growth and expansion of the private universities in Bangladesh is depicted in Figure 4. The first private university, namely the North South University (NSU), was approved by the government of Bangladesh (GoB) on 5 November 1992. The government in power at that time (1991–1996) showed a favourable stance towards opening the door to more private universities in Bangladesh. The figure shows that during the period of 1991–1996, sixteen private universities (mostly in metropolitan Dhaka, with only two in Chittagong) were opened. During 1996–2001, the government was not favourable disposed toward the concept of private

sector of education. Data shows that only four new universities were added to the list during 1996–2001. After 2001, the private university concept got a significant boost again. The figure shows data taken from UGC that in a 6 to 7 years period, the total number of private universities has gone up to 56 (UGC 2008).

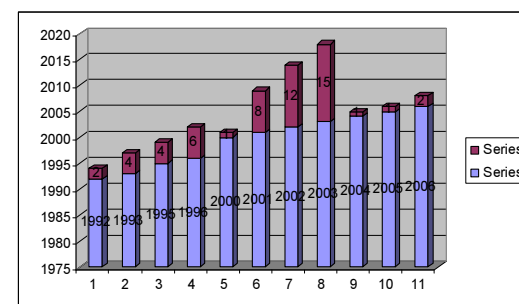


Figure 4: Growth of Private Universities in Bangladesh, 1992-2008. Series-1 shows years of establishment of private universities. Series-2 shows The number of private universities established.

Problems Facing Private Universities

Many educationists have expressed their doubts about the ability of the private sector to run as degree-awarding universities. Many feel that the government should retain the monopoly on higher education, this being a public service that is best rendered by the government. Also, these educational entrepreneurs were seen as being inexperienced in running a university and that the venture would be too risky for the society and the nation as a whole. Some even equated private universities with 'glorified coaching centres.' The proponents of private universities for their part contended that, if an enabling environment could be provided, the private sector could not only run businesses, industries, schools, colleges, hospitals or NGOs, but also universities.

The most common allegation that is raised against founders of private universities is that they are driven by a profit motive. Private investments of millions of takas have to take this factor into consideration. However, founder directors/members deny that their universities are run for profit; they point out that the extra or surplus money generated from tuition fees are re-invested in university development. In the beginning, well-known educationists and philanthropists established private universities; now rich professionals, business persons and large NGOs are also establishing private universities. The five crore taka deposit that is a necessary requisite for approval results in the involvement of rich individual in the establishment of private

universities. Moreover, for the first few years, most private universities have to depend largely on contributions for survival and growth. The public views with suspicion the very high salaries of the VCs/Pro VCs and a few top officials, as well as the lavish dinners and cultural functions that are held in luxurious hotels. However, private universities' high profitability in operations is an established fact. For instance, in the year 2001, out of total assets of Tk 292.5 million, the University of Science and Technology (USTC)'s accumulated surplus accounted for Tk 51.2 million, and North South University's (NSU) accumulated surplus accounted for Tk 189.40 million out of total assets of Tk 200.70 million.

The quality of education and related facilities are the next point of controversy. Quality varies significantly between private universities; there are differences of quality even amongst departments of the same university. Course contents vary widely among private universities. Sub-standard intakes, inferior faculty standard and poor classroom environment are some of the usual complaints. These universities use attractive names; circulate colourful and glossy brochures and make unrealistic promises in order to attract admission seekers. Thus, many who should not have pursued higher education get admission into these institutions.

The very high tuition fee of private universities is a common point of criticism. Non-profit operation and an affordable education for common people are not the principles on which private universities operate. In the NSU, a student has to pay Tk 3,50,000/- for an MBA degree and Tk 6, 50,000/- for a degree in B.Sc in Computer Science. In USTC, an MBBS student has to pay Tk 14,00,000.00 to obtain a degree. Private universities justify their high fees on the grounds that they run without any government subsidy. However, private Universities in general do not clearly mention the tuition fees or teachers salary, which is required of them under the PUA. With only seven persons in the audit staff, the UGC is not able to detect financial cover-ups. The result of a survey showed that 55% were dissatisfied at the facilities the university provided them, in the light of the high tuition fees that they were paying. Almost all private universities are situated in rented buildings. These buildings are not designed for academic pursuits and are not suitable for university activities. The PUA requires concerned private universities to shift to their own campus within seven years (on condition another five years may be given) of establishment, but only a few universities have met this requirement. Non-availability of suitable land in and around Dhaka and the exorbitant cost of land are used as excuses by these institutions. However, a number of leading private universities have bought land in and around Dhaka and are in the process of constructing their own campuses.

Academic programs offered by private universities are limited and market-driven and do not cater to social needs of the country. Most private

universities concentrate on Business Administration and Computer Science. Many people therefore question the validity of calling an institution a university that offers only four or five subjects. Private universities, on the other hand, cannot afford to open programs that do not attract a substantial number of students. Private universities run a program-based education system, comprising semesters, courses and credits. In a good private university, each credit involves 15 to 16 contact or class hours. However, some private universities have reduced each credit to 11 or 12 contact hours, thus undermining the course content and program.

Courses offered by these universities are sometimes rushed through and not adequately taught. Employers often complain that graduates of private universities often lack in-depth knowledge. One of the reasons for this is that private universities try to accommodate many courses and semesters in a year to maximize earnings. Moreover, part-time teachers often take successive classes in different universities in a single day to maximize their income. In the process, the individual teacher may be benefited, but the students suffer from poor teaching and teacher's lack of commitment. Faculty strength is weak in most private universities and other than 'On the Job Training'; there is no faculty development scheme. Dearth of qualified full-time core teachers adversely affects the teaching quality of many private universities. At least 60-70% of teachers should be full time to ensure quality teaching.

Private universities, established in rented premises, suffer from acute space shortage, especially as regards in library, laboratory and classroom facilities. There is no space/room for group discussions or seminars as there are no large hall rooms. Students are forced to loiter on pavements or streets. Private universities are located near busy roads where traffic noise and other distractions hamper classroom learning.

Advantages of Private Universities

The growth of private universities in Bangladesh is phenomenal. These universities offer degrees in subjects like computer engineering, management information system, civil engineering, electrical engineering, architecture, environment, development studies, English language, physics, electronics, physical & community medicines and so on. Besides, many private universities have expanded their programs from the undergraduate to the graduate level, by offering MBAs, Master in Economics, Master in Development Studies, Master in Computer Science, etc. Many private universities have introduced evening MBA Programs for professionals. Significant advantages that accrue to private universities are:

a. **Flexibility:** Private Universities are flexible and relatively free to introduce new subjects or discard non-demanding subjects based on market demand.

Unlike public universities, these can readily modify their curriculum to suit changing requirements.

b. Adherence to Schedules: There is no session jam, student unrest or violence in private universities. During the days of political violence, private universities arranged regular make-up classes on holidays and in the evenings and could successfully graduate their students on time.

c. Credit Transfer/Collaboration : Credit transfer to foreign universities and institutions are available in most private universities. Moreover, some of the better run private universities have developed academic linkages with a number of foreign universities through faculty and curriculum exchange, exchange of course materials, post graduate research collaboration, etc. Teachers from foreign universities had also taught in these universities for one or more semesters. This enabled the university to update the curriculum, course content and teaching methods. One of the private universities has even appointed an academican from the Philippines as the Vice- Chancellor.

d. Evaluation of Teachers: Teachers' qualifications in some of the better run private universities are higher than the public universities and UGC's guidelines. Masters/ PhD degrees from North American Universities are preferred. The teaching ability of teachers is tested through demonstrative lectures. Moreover, students and senior teachers regularly assess teachers.

e. Career Services Department : Well-run private universities have 'Career Services Department' through which final semester students are advised about their choice of profession and job prospects. Graduated students enlist their names and wait for a response. Teacher and staff responsible for this section maintain regular contact with prospective employers. The university staff assists graduates to secure suitable jobs. Frequent job fairs are arranged through the career assistance program.

f. Graduates Employment Prospect: Graduates of better and well reputed private universities like the NSU, IUB, AIUB, and USTC get suitable jobs. USTC, which teaches medical science, has students from regional and developing countries such as Nepal, Sri Lanka, Palestine and Saudi Arabia. Many private university graduates seek employment abroad.

g. Emphasis on English Language and Computer Literacy: The medium of instruction in private universities is English and libraries have recent texts and other reference books. Many Bangla medium students attain proficiency in oral and written English in these universities. Students also attain computer literacy. These proficiencies give them an advantage in the job market.

h. Collaboration with Industries and Companies: Private universities maintain a collaborative relationship with reputed industries, multi-national companies and corporate business houses, primarily to run students' internship programs. Practical knowledge acquired through internship gives an edge to private university graduates in the job market.

j. Financial Assistance Program: All the private universities have financial support policies for the students. Full scholarships are given to the first few, who were at the top of the merit list of SSC and HSC or equivalent examinations. Tuition waivers are also given at different rates based on individual need and academic performance. Some private universities arrange part-time employment for needy students. However, private universities in general do not cater to students from a lower income group, unless they can qualify for a full tuition waiver.

Private Universities in panic

The private universities started up on the condition, in accordance to the 1992 ordinance, and then the 1998 and 2010 amended ordinance, that they would shift to permanent campuses within 7 years (on condition another 5 years may be given). Most of the universities, some over 19 years old and some just 5, have not shifted to their own campuses as yet. They have failed to comply with the government's directives to shift to campuses on their own land. On the contrary, private universities have mushroomed up all over the place----- in lanes and alleyways on of the capital city's bustling residential area as well as in office building for commercial use. They have not shifted to their own campuses but remain in rented premises scattered all around the city.

According to the Private University Act Amendment 2010, the government issued the regulation that private universities would have to have campuses on at least one acre of land, in one place, within the city. And if this condition will not be fulfilled by September 2011, Admissions to these universities would be closed. This order has several of the private universities reeling in panic.

The private universities authorities state that it is near impossible to get one unbroken plot of one acre within the city. And even if it is found, one acre of land costs anything between 100 to 150 crore taka. Then to construct a proper campus will take about 80 to 100 crore taka. They contend that it is impossible to arrange this land and funds for the campus within such a short span of time. They have appealed to the government for an extension of the time limit.

Initiatives for new universities

Under rules and regulations of Private University Act Amendment 2010, not less than 80 applications were produced before the Secretary, Ministry of

Education seeking permission for establishing new private universities. **International Standard University** is one of those. Owners of renowned corporate business group named '**Standard Group**' are the initiators of this university. For this purpose a Board of Trustees named '**International Standard University Trust**' headed by Engr. A KM Mosharraf Hussain as the Chairman was registered under Joint Stock Companies & Firms, Bangladesh; while Engr.Md. Atiqur Rahman, Mr. H T M Quader Newaz, Mr.Hasnat Mosharraf remain as the Vice –Chairman, Treasurer, and Member Secretary respectively. Rest 8 persons shall remain as general members.

The Board of Trustees wishes to establish the university on account of their corporate social responsibilities. The university will act as a non-profit voluntary organization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the discussion so far, the following recommendations are made for the improvement of the quality of education in private universities:

a. **Separate Commission:** There should be a separate commission for private universities. Other than scrutinizing and recommending setting up new private universities, the primary role of this proposed commission will be to monitor the academic curriculum of all private universities through an Accreditation Body. The proposed Commission's role should be a combination of regulator and facilitator functions. Alternatively, the UGC should increase the monitoring of private universities, primarily for the newer ones and those not doing well to enable them to improve.

b. **Rating System:** There should be a comprehensive and credible Rating system for all private universities. There is a considerable difference in their curriculum, student and faculty standard and the quality and quantity of facilities. There should be a national standard rating system.

c. **Collaboration between Public and Private Universities:** Collaboration between public and private universities of Bangladesh in the field of academic curriculum, research, IT, internship and exchange of teachers and students can be useful. The years of experience and vast resources of public universities are invaluable and could enrich private universities. Similarly, the American system of education including assessment, teachers' evaluation, ideas and expertise of visiting professors can be useful for public universities.

d. **Restricted Approval of Private University:** The GOB should be more selective while giving approval to new private universities. They should allow private universities in the Dhaka Metropolitan area only those who have own

permanent campus building like **International Standard University** situated at 69, Mohakhali C/A, Dhaka, and should encourage establishment of private universities in Divisional and District towns. The Government should scrutinize the Founders' social credibility, academic background and underlying motives.

e. **Collaboration between Private Universities and Industries, Trade and Business Entities:** There should be a meaningful collaboration between private universities and industries, trade bodies and all other trade and commerce related entities. This system can play a pivotal role in formulating a need-based higher education system.

f. **Access to University Education:** Admission criteria for universities should be geared both towards maintaining academic standards and meeting the increasing demand for higher education.

g. **Research Activities:** The universities should conduct Postgraduate research on a regular basis, as good quality research helps a university achieve credibility at home and abroad.

h. **Relocating to Own Campus:** Private universities established on rented buildings should move to their own purpose-built campus as soon as possible. Various facilities extended to the students, particularly library, computer, Internet and laboratory space and equipments, should be upgraded.

CONCLUSION

Private education in Bangladesh is getting more competitive with the remarkable increase in the number of academic institutions in the country. The ineluctable forces of globalization in this new millennium make this growth path more complex and challenging. Despite the relentless and continuous effort of private educational institutions, quality has not yet achieved at the desired level. The cost of private education is another dimension to consider, as it is unaffordable in Bangladesh, and more effort needs to be made if costs are to be lowered. However, the system is proceeding gradually towards greater improvement. Nevertheless, all the problems considered here should be addressed more rigorously to ensure the quality of education in Bangladesh reaches the desired level. This study has shed the light on the dimensions perceived by students as associated with the quality of education. These dimensions are faculty credentials, the academic calendar, campus facilities, research facilities and the cost of education. The study also concludes that, in general, the cost of education in private universities in Bangladesh is some what expensive due to the imbalance between increasing tuition fees and an increasing amount of financial aid and scholarships.

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