

Private Universities in Bangladesh Possibilities and Challenges



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Imtiaz Ahmed, University of Dhaka
Iftekhar Iqbal, University of Dhaka
Parvez Karim Abbasi, East West University

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Introduction

The last decade of the twentieth century saw an end to the Cold War and the triumphant spread of the free market or laissez-faire approach, which explicitly recognized the dominant role of the private sector in matters of business and various aspects of the economy. The ripples of this paradigm shift were also felt in Bangladesh, which gradually accelerated the concomitant processes of deregulation, denationalization and privatization. These far-reaching changes have influenced government policies related to vital sectors such as health and education.

Education is considered an inalienable human right, and a country's overall economic growth and development trajectory is inextricably tied to education, especially higher education. Tertiary education is the motivating force behind human capital and skilled labour. The Government of Bangladesh is committed to providing education to all its citizens. Bangladesh has a relatively young population, with a median age of 26.4 years. Around 20 percent of the country's population falls in the 15-24 years age group. On average, around 23 percent of students who pass the HSC examination are admitted to public and private university first-year courses each year. Based on the current trend, it is estimated that by the year 2020, around 362,000 students will be enrolled in first year courses at tertiary level institutions. Needless to say, it will exert tremendous pressure on the country's higher education system.¹

Bangladesh is set to benefit from the 'demographic dividend' (brought about by a decline in the fertility rate and increase in the youth population) as the number of people in the working age population (15-64 years) is greater than the non-working or dependent groups of the population. In order to realize the potential economic benefits from the demographic dividend, Bangladesh needs to invest in developing human capital. Gains in skills and productivity can only be ensured if a sizable proportion of the workforce is highly educated and skilled, which in turn will lay the foundation for a knowledge based economy. The East Asian growth miracle is a testament to the value of human capital to a country. Hence, the

¹ Elizabeth Boye and MA Mannan, Bangladesh: Public-Private Partnership in Higher Education (Asian Development Bank, July 2014).

role of higher education becomes a key priority in enhancing the competitiveness of the workforce and accelerating the rate of economic growth and development.

Prior to 1992, higher education was exclusively the domain of the public sector in Bangladesh. However, the performance of the public universities were seriously hampered by infrastructural constraints such as the limited availability of space, classrooms, teachers, resources, session jam or academic backlogs, politically motivated violence and armed confrontations on public university campuses, and an ever increasing stream of students aspiring to obtain higher education. Along with these challenges, there was severe demand-supply gap that could not be addressed by the public universities alone. These circumstances led to the opening of private initiatives in the higher education sector.

Members from the business community, investors, philanthropists and educationists in conjunction with policy planners, stepped in to remedy the situation. The Private University Act of 1992 paved the way for private universities in Bangladesh as a means to promote higher education and take pressure off the heavily strained public universities. The Act was subsequently amended in 1998. The burgeoning of private universities (owing to ever increasing entrants to the private tertiary education stream) and unevenness in the quality of education amongst various private universities led to the Private University Act of 2010 replacing the Act of 1992. The new Act emphasized issues such as quality assurance, human resource development, social service and good governance. There was greater scope for regulation, coordination and cooperation between the Ministry of Education, the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the private universities.

As of 2016, there are 95 private universities that have permission to operate, out of which 84 are functioning. The number of students studying in private universities is 4,63,767, out of which 40 percent are women.² According to the UGC Annual Report of 2014, a total of 14,219 teachers were employed in private universities, out of which 9427 were employed on a full-time basis.³ The number of students studying in private universities has already

² “Private Universities: Successes and Challenges”, The Daily Star, September 3, 2016.

³ Annual Report 2014, University Grants Commission (Dhaka: UGC, 2015).

exceeded those studying at public universities (excluding National University and Bangladesh Open University). Based on the average growth rate in the past few years, the number of students in private universities is expected to be around 1 million by 2020.⁴ This would also require concomitant increase in the number of teachers, administrative staff, programmes, departments and infrastructural and institutional capacity.

In the past three decades, despite challenges and controversies, private universities in Bangladesh have played a crucial role in easing the severe demand-supply imbalance in the tertiary sector. These institutions have also reduced the outflow of undergraduate level students going abroad, thereby saving a large amount of valuable foreign exchange. It has also provided employment opportunities to an increasing pool of foreign-educated Bangladeshis, thereby reversing the pernicious effects of brain drain. The graduates from public universities have also found a new source of employment in a highly competitive job market. White collar employment has risen in Bangladesh, thanks to the emergence of a robust and vibrant private sector in higher education. It also needs to be noted that the private universities' market driven approach with its emphasis on business studies, IT and pharmacy, among other fields, has provided a steady supply of skilled labour to Bangladesh's expanding service sector - especially multinational corporations, local corporate firms, banks, telecommunication companies, upper management of ready made garments and real estate, pharmaceutical companies, etc. More and more private university graduates are going abroad on scholarships to pursue Master's and Doctoral degrees. Private universities, contrary to occasional allegation of elitist bias, host a greater proportion of students coming from middle income and middle class backgrounds (this trend is also associated with the drive for upward income and social mobility amongst many low and middle-income families). Most of the universities, in compliance with UGC rules, provide some form of financial assistance to needy yet meritorious students. The recent launching of a nano-satellite by the students of a leading private university shows the rapid strides that have been made in the field of science and technology within a short span of time. Academic partnerships with foreign

⁴ Elizabeth Boye and MA Mannan, Bangladesh: Public-Private Partnership in Higher Education.

universities in the form of credit transfer arrangements are on the rise. The emphasis on hiring highly qualified academics, the emphasis on both the quantity and quality of research, the introduction of new teaching methods and better supervision in many of the universities is a welcome development, which is in step with the needs of the nation in the twenty first century.

However, there remain considerable obstacles and challenges. The rapid spread of private universities represent a quantitative increase. However, in terms of quality of education and satisfaction of students regarding the learning experience and job prospects, the record is patchy and uneven. Some universities have pulled ahead of the rest and provide education which is comparable to that of the best public universities in the country. In some cases, they have even earned regional and international recognition. A second segment consists of universities trying to raise the quality of education and making the governance structure more transparent. Another category of universities are reported to be engaged in various unethical activities such as selling certificates, opening various franchises of the same university in different campuses, conflict and competition amongst the board of trustees, etc. It would be unwise to bracket all the private universities under one single umbrella. There is vast disparity in terms of quality of education offered by the various private universities, which may not be redressed in the short or medium run. There have been questions about the quality of students, teachers, the absence of research, adequate lab facilities, Internet connectivity, absence of permanent campus and residential facilities, absence of well-stocked and up-to-date libraries, the lack of knowledge creation, commercial and business driven approaches to education, comparatively higher tuition fees, a sense of disconnect with the national ethos and identity, the growing threat of radicalization and the complicity of a few misguided students in anti-state activities and terrorism.

From the government side, realizing the need to boost quality of education especially in the tertiary sector, and in a bid to raise the skills and quality of human capital and boost research and development, it has adopted the Higher Education Strategic Plan 2006–2026. A direct outcome of this is the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP) and the proposed Accreditation Council. Multilateral organizations such as World Bank, Asian

Development Bank (in skills development and IT sector) are also in active collaboration with the UGC in raising the quality and efficacy of the education being provided at the tertiary level.

All these positive achievements and negative issues and challenges need critical assessment to ensure that private universities exist to fully materialize their potential.

I. Objective

The objective of this study is to formulate a policy paper on private universities in terms of identification and prioritization of challenges, future prospects and formulation of action-oriented, implementable policy recommendations, in consultation with the three most important stakeholders of the private university arena: 1) students of different private universities, 2) teachers of different private universities and 3) board of trustees and chief executives of different private universities. These three groups essentially comprise the triad on which the edifice of a private university rests on. The students are the most important stakeholders in this process. The students are the end product of the process and their needs, aspirations, desires and perceptions need to be recognized and accorded due importance and emphasis. The teachers perform the vital task of imparting learning to the students and are thereby directly responsible for the quality of education. They act as the interface between the students and the University management. The board of trustees and the vice-chancellors of the universities are the ones who are charged with the efficacious day to day management of the institution and its future direction.

The paper acknowledges the fact that several studies and discussions have been carried out in the past on the state of private universities in Bangladesh. However, the goal, in this case, is to reconcile potential points of conflict amongst the various stakeholders and come up with holistic solutions with a view to maximize the potential of private universities in the fields of knowledge creation, innovation and entrepreneurship, and make Bangladesh a prosperous and peaceful nation in this increasingly uncertain world. Policy recommendations will stem from the inputs and opinions provided by the participants.

A series of issues pertinent to the different stakeholders have been provided below, based on review of related literature, key informant interviews and informal discussions. These points have been provided as a background template to generate discussions, comments and exchange of ideas from the concerned stakeholders. At this point, these issues are general in nature, and not necessarily applicable for all private universities.

II. Students

The most important stakeholders of the private university education stream are the students, since they are the clients (so to speak). Most students pay for their own education based on support from their parents, relatives, guardians, or their own income from part time jobs. It should be noted that private universities largely rely on student tuition and fixed deposits to pay for their operating expenses, meaning that private university education is to a large extent student-driven. A student-centric approach to education, which is geared towards raising their skills and their employment prospects in a very competitive job market, is the key. Students of various universities, in key informant interviews, have identified some of the advantages stemming from private education at the tertiary level.

Key areas of strength

1. Teacher student ratio is better in private universities as opposed to public universities.
2. Students' accessibility to teachers is higher compared to public universities.
3. Certain degree of accountability of teachers is there.
4. Updated study materials.
5. Absence of session jam and timely completion of the academic programme.
6. Absence of political party based student politics.
7. Greater access to digital technology.
8. Higher degree of security for students, especially female students.

9. Greater expertise due to soft skills (presentation, communication, ease with digital technology).⁵
10. Greater demand for graduates from certain private universities in multinational firms, financial and telecommunication sectors.
12. Class environment is more conducive to learning.
13. Catering to the gap in demand and supply in the higher education market due to limitations in the number of seats on offer from public universities.
14. Increasing provisions for scholarships for needy and bright students.

Based on their experiences, students have identified certain limitations and weaknesses. They are as follows:

Key areas of weakness

1. Comparatively higher tuition fees.
2. Comparatively higher admission fees.
3. Absence of permanent campus.
4. Absence of facilities - lack of transportation, student halls, residential campus, and outdoor sport facilities.
5. More focus on teaching and less focus or lack of encouragement in research.
6. Limited scope for extra-curricular and recreational activities.
7. Relatively narrow scope for students' collective representation on issues affecting their interests or concerns.

⁵ Private universities often organize various conferences, seminar, Interuniversity program which helps the students to build themselves and gives opportunity for skill development outside the classroom. It also promotes strong communication skill with better establishment of network among students. Students expect more opportunities to develop softer skills in private universities.(Workshop proceedings)

8. Possibility of grade manipulation and relative lack of transparency.
9. In some cases, absence of supplementary exams to redress poor grades as opposed to retaking of grades.
10. CGPA variation in universities reflects uneven quality across universities, which later on pose problems in job selection criterion.
11. Lack of sense of community and feelings of attachment amongst the students of a particular university due to open credit system.
12. Students often acquire an education with little or no relevance to the Bangladeshi context. However, in recent times, Bangladesh studies have been made compulsory in private universities. Thus students possess a certain amount of knowledge related to Bangladesh.
13. Lack of social recognition leading to a sense of inferiority.⁶
14. CGPA-centric pursuit of education does not necessarily equate to knowledge acquisition in many cases.
15. Conflicting opinion regarding threat of radicalization. Majority opinion is that private universities do not encourage radicalism.
16. Two vs. three semesters. There are financial issues linked with two-semester systems, but there is obvious academic and learning benefits in a three-semester system.⁷

⁶ The media is often negatively biased towards private universities news to some extent. While making any report on private universities, the education reporter collects information from UGC or lowly ranked private universities and generalize regarding the state of all the private universities.(Workshop proceedings)

⁷ There is a debate between UGC and private university management bodies regarding two semesters or three semesters in a year. It is better to have two semesters in a year. In that case, both the workload of students and teachers will get reduced. Regarding collection of tuition fees,private universities can collect the tuition fees on a monthly, quarterly, bi-annually and annual basis. Then, families of different financial condition can avail the most convenient system of paying tuition fees before the final exam. Parents will get more relief regarding paying tuition fees. (Workshop proceedings)

17. High levels of stress. A recent study⁸ on undergraduate university students found that over 60 percent of those surveyed reported being under extreme stress, due to course work, assignments, and exam preparation (majority of students surveyed were from private universities). This bodes ill for the mental health and well-being of students. Universities should actively employ trained student counselors and psychiatrists to help students cope with academic stress.
18. Limited relevance of course curriculum to real-world job skills. Students majoring in business often complain that textbooks have a foreign orientation in their content which is not relevant to the Bangladeshi context. Many faculty members are less industry-oriented than desired.⁹
19. Rote learning and memorization with little emphasis on application or building analytical skills. Interactive and participatory mode of teaching not yet widely followed.
20. Despite the option for students to pursue internships in some private universities, many students prefer to complete a supervised thesis paper as an alternative, where applicable. This deprives the student of valuable job related experience. The universities should encourage students to pursue internship opportunities, wherever possible. To do this, universities should have greater involvement with private firms and companies.

III. Teachers

Teachers are regarded as the lifeblood of any university. The presence or absence of highly educated, trained and effective teachers makes or breaks a university's reputation. A teacher's erudition, knowledge, effective teaching methods and techniques, familiarity with modern digital technology, research exposure and output and ability to conduct or supervise students' research are considered essential in increasing the university's academic standing and consequently attracting higher quantity as well as better quality of students. This is

⁸ Undergraduate Academic Experience Survey (UAES) 2016-17, Centre for Enterprise and Society, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh.

⁹ *ibid.*

especially true for teachers of private universities, who have to compete to attract students in the tertiary sector. Some of the issues that were of concern for private university teachers are as follows:

Key Issues

1. Pressure from the university on teachers to ensure higher pass rates in courses despite mediocre or unsatisfactory performance of students.
2. Despite quantitative increase, there has been a noticeable decline in the quality of students who are being admitted in recent times (which has coincided with a spurt of CGPA 5 students in the secondary exams), thereby lowering the standards of the class.
3. Reluctance to learning by students outside the prescribed text books. Hence, scope for knowledge transfer is limited.
4. Pressure exerted by students on teachers through lodging complaints to departmental Chairmen, Deans, or upper echelons of the university management and sometimes providing poor evaluation of the teachers on unreasonable grounds.
5. Heavy teaching load (ranging from 3 to 4 courses per semester) coupled with mandatory office hours leave most concerned faculties with little time to conduct research or publish articles in peer reviewed journals. UGC could set a limit on the number of courses and hours a lecturer is expected to spend actively teaching versus doing research.
6. Lack of job security in the private university arena often inhibits a sense of attachment or belonging to the university.
7. Lack of rewards and positive incentives for efficient teachers. This may be attributed to institutional culture, which does not encourage or reward faculty research, excellent performance in teaching or guidance of student research.
8. Lack of association or union amongst the teachers reduces leverage with the university management.
9. Arbitrary hiring and firing policies in some universities.

10. Entry level salaries for the same position in a particular university may vary widely.
11. Poor staff development. This may be attributed to inadequate training facilities, lack of funds for training (whether within Bangladesh or in programs abroad), meager resources for research, lack of ties with the business community, the absence of a system for regularly updating knowledge, a general lack of access to academic papers and journals, and inadequate laboratory facilities.

IV. Board of Trustees/Higher Management

The Board of Trustees and the upper echelons of university management (Vice Chancellor, Pro Vice Chancellor) are the ones who are at the helm of the operations of private universities and provide the future bearings and roadmap for a university's overall expansion and consolidation. It lies on their shoulders to ensure the fiscal viability of a university as well as enhance its academic reputation. It is a tight rope walk. Understandably, they face substantive obstacles. Some of the key issues are provided below:

Key Issues

1. Lack of funding forces some universities to be completely reliant on tuition fees. Thus, in order to attract better quality teachers from abroad, the university cannot often afford higher pay and benefit packages, which would in turn require raising tuition fees substantially.¹⁰
2. Tie-ups and collaboration with the private sector to fund research activities and skills development is largely missing.
3. No support or concessions for private universities in term of acquiring land and the construction of campuses. The campus problem could be solved by government allocation of land outside urban areas that are accessible by public transportation and have good communications facilities. Such land should be made available to private universities

¹⁰ Bangladeshi private universities are starting with much lower funds and land compared to India. In the US, private universities are getting free land and government funding, and donors get tax break benefits. (Workshop proceedings)

to use at a concessional price. The government should also consider creating a “higher education enclave” or private university zone with modern facilities and infrastructure, to accommodate several private universities in one place.¹¹

4. Absence of an effective association of private universities or a consortium to effectively bargain with the UGC and the Government. At present, the Association of Private Universities of Bangladesh (APUB) is a loosely knit organization and more often than not, cannot present a united front while dealing with the UGC.
5. Lack of institutional mechanisms for sharing of resources amongst private universities, which would greatly reduce costs (Example: Joint Library of Private Universities; Joint E-Library).
6. Lack of effective teaching know-how and method amongst graduates entering the private university as teachers.
7. Lack of transparency and accountability amongst the Board of Trustees of some universities.
8. Severe factional infighting amongst the Board of Trustees of some universities often weakens the Vice Chancellor’s position and disrupts the normal day to day functioning of the university.
9. Approval process from UGC for new programmes is lengthy. Universities often complain of excessive interference and micro management by UGC. UGC permission is required in order to start new course curriculum and amend the existing courses, and this is a time consuming process. UGC needs to be divided into two wings - one for public and another for private universities in order to facilitate and expedite its activities.
10. Absence of PhD programmes inhibits private universities from realizing its true potential as it cannot prevent the truly qualified researchers and academics from going abroad.

¹¹ Innovative Strategies in Higher Education for Accelerated Human Resource Development in South Asia-Bangladesh (Asian Development Bank, 2015)

11. Universities situated outside Dhaka have difficulties attracting well qualified faculty members.
12. Private universities save on salary costs by employing more part-time faculty and younger teachers at a low remuneration. These part-time faculty members mostly come from local public universities.¹² For example, the University of Dhaka and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology provide a source of part-time or adjunct faculty for private universities in Dhaka, while Chittagong University of Engineering & Technology is the main source of part-time faculty for Chittagong-based private universities.¹³
13. Private universities could initiate a comprehensive survey of the job placement of their graduating students. This would help them to gain a clearer understanding of the competitiveness of their students in the job market.
14. Universities could identify currently employed alumni regarding the perceived benefits of education at the workplace. They could also receive feedback from their ex-students regarding the skills gap which they want to address in their alma mater.
15. Universities could also carry out skill-requirement and satisfaction surveys covering the employers of their former students in the job market. This could also be done by the UGC or an independent body on behalf of all the universities. The results could then be cross-checked and compared. This would in turn give a clearer market signal to both the students and the universities regarding employer preferences.
16. Universities should actively pursue collaboration and long term partnerships with foreign universities. A number of leading private universities have already initiated these measures. Collaboration has occurred in curriculum development, teacher and student exchanges, and credit transfers; and these ties have paved the way for knowledge transfer and reciprocal improvements in academia.

¹² Private universities often lack senior faculty members. It is very difficult to find eligible Professors and Associate Professors. Hence, they have to rely on part time public university faculty(Workshop Proceedings)

¹³ *ibid.*

17. Private universities could pursue University-Industry linkage (UIL). Win-win solutions can be created for universities and industries by allowing them to collaborate in R&D. Industry can leverage universities' R&D capacity based on basic and applied science disciplines. Universities can have students trained to gain valuable practical experience. Universities may have technology, but not the capacity and financing for product development, marketing, and distribution on a commercial scale. In incubator set-ups, the university graduates can collaborate with industries on such tasks as commercializing their concepts and technology products.¹⁴
18. Universities could accommodate expat Bangladeshi professors to teach for a certain period of time of the year (say one semester) as visiting fellow or visiting professor. This would help raise existing standards within the university and also help in updating outmoded syllabus and modules. This could pave the way for greater numbers of students to go abroad on scholarships. It should be mentioned that quite a few leading private universities have followed this strategy (to varying degrees of success).
19. Private universities could jointly organize international conferences and seminars by pooling their resources. This would enable top quality academics to come over and share their ideas and research. It would facilitate knowledge transfer and greater recognition for the universities.

V. Concluding Remarks

It is hoped that through identification of some of the key strengths and vulnerabilities of the private universities and some tentative policy recommendations (from the perspectives of students, teachers, upper echelon of university management and trustees), further dialogues, debates and recommendations can be generated from the concerned stakeholders. The issues identified and policy recommendations in this report are by no means exhaustive. It is hoped it will serve as a template to guide a series of planned workshops with the above mentioned stakeholders. Inputs from these engagements will help to furnish a more comprehensive policy paper.¹⁵

¹⁴ Elizabeth Boye and MA Mannan, Bangladesh: Public-Private Partnership in Higher Education.

¹⁵ The proceedings of the four workshops held by FES with concerned stakeholders have been attached in the appendix.

Appendix

Report on 1st Workshop

16 August, 2017

Professor Imtiaz Ahmed, Dr Iftekhar Iqbal from University of Dhaka and Parvez Karim Abbasi from East West University in collaboration with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Bangladesh organized the first workshop on Private Universities in Bangladesh: Possibilities and Challenges at Hotel Lake Castle, Dhaka on 16 August, 2017. The program was chaired by former Vice Chancellor Professor Imran Rahman, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh while Professor Imtiaz Ahmed gave the opening remarks. Special remarks were made by Franziska Korn, Resident Representative, FES Bangladesh. The workshop aimed at having an interactive dialogue among students from different private universities on challenges, opportunities and future directions in higher education in private universities, which lead to the ideas and suggestions that contributed to formulating an action oriented and implementable policy paper. About 33 students from 12 different universities joined this program.

In the opening remarks, Professor Imtiaz Ahmed said that during the last two years, with the support of FES, a study was conducted on University of Dhaka. As a result, a book was published last year named *“University of Dhaka: Making Unmaking Remaking”*. A policy paper named *“University of Dhaka: In search for excellence, issues and policy recommendations”* was also generated from this book and a series of dialogues with various major stakeholders, including civil society members, politicians, journalists, business people and others, were held. Out of this project, a website will be launched soon to involve students in redesigning the future classroom, curriculum and student politics, and to inspire them to engage in social issues. Chittagong University is also going to follow this pattern and hopefully, Rajshahi University will do the same. He also mentioned that private and public universities do not have a functional relationship due to their different natures and difficult interactions. He hoped for a solid relationship between public and private universities in the future. A series

of three workshops will be organised with students, faculty, administration, members of the board and parents to generate suggestion and ideas for policy papers on private universities.

Starting with a warm welcome to the chief guest, research team, colleagues and youth present, Franziska Korn gave a short historical and functional description of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in her comments. She stated FES is a non-profit political foundation funded by the German government, which started its journey in Bangladesh from 2014. There are offices of FES in more than 100 countries. Bangladesh has been always part of their work, but for more interactions and to understand the Bangladeshi development process better, FES opened an office in Bangladesh. FES is working on both political and social issues, including economic development. It is named after the first democratically elected German President Friedrich Ebert. FES has set education as a top priority issue worldwide. It also provides scholarships to underprivileged students. While it started with public universities, the importance of private universities were soon realized. Education improves skills, which in turn creates a better labor market and promotes economic well being. So it is important to know what type of education is needed in the country.

Upon the invitation of Professor Imtiaz Ahmed, Parvez Karim Abbasi gave a short power point presentation on the findings of his research on the state of private universities in Bangladesh. After that, the floor was opened for ideas and suggestions.

Student's Dialogue Summary

1. Private universities often organize various conferences, seminars and Inter-university programs which help the students to learn and provide opportunities for skills development outside the classroom. It also promotes strong communication skills with better establishment of networks among students. Students expect more such opportunities to develop softer skills in private universities.
2. As most of the private universities follow a very strict schedule, it is hard for students to do research and in-depth studies of specific subjects. With this limited time, it becomes harder to get immersed in specific topics. However, another segment of students is

considering this an advantage, since they are able to enjoy a session jam free educational experience. All are agreed that this limited timing is creating rush and restrictions to joining in extra curricular activities.

3. In private universities, curricula get updated according to the time. The student gets up-to-date software training from teachers. Most of the students said computers and other lab equipments are available on campus.
4. Students have mixed opinions about the open credit system. Due to this system, students cannot have long lasting relationships with each other. Others are saying it gives an opportunity to know senior students and the sharing of experiences has huge benefits.
5. Students said extra non-departmental courses have given them opportunities to know what other students are thinking, and what is going on in another department. They pointed it out as a chance to know other students from different departments and asked for more non-departmental courses.
6. Private universities give a good number of scholarships. However in the admission test, scholarship students found that there are bias in terms of Bangla medium and English medium grading policies.
7. Research and resource facilities need to be improved outside of the curriculum. Practical courses like internships should be in the middle of the graduation degree, so that students can learn more.
8. Every university does not have the same grading system. As a result, it creates confusion among students about their quality. Students suggested bringing a uniform grading system in all private universities so that discrimination in getting foreign scholarships and job searching does not occur.
9. On-campus job facilities support students and make them independent. GTA and UTA job facilities give students additional benefits to develop and improve in research (and attract foreign scholarships) by working closely with teachers.

10. In private universities, students gets a chance to do a double major. It helps to diversify their knowledge and improve skills.
11. Lack of student counseling and guidance. Due to the huge number of students, teachers cannot provide enough time for counseling all of them. Classes need to be redesigned so that every student will be heard. Students will know what is better for them and what to do next.
12. Students suggested a common website or news portal for all universities so that they can get connected.
13. Absence of the alumni association is a problem in private universities. Students argued for a strong alumni association.
14. Universities should promote sports in students. If the permanent campus is not available, students should be encouraged to join inter-university competitions.
15. There are lots of unqualified students in private universities. Public universities get students through strong admission processes. On the other hand, anyone adhering to some minimum requirements can get admitted in private universities.
16. Other issues which students talked about are the absence of permanent residence, shortage of space for discussions, high cost of tuition fees, advantage of teachers evaluation and advantages of studying with international students in some universities.

In his remarks as chief guest, Professor Imran Rahman said that the absence of bureaucratic problems and better incentives to work hard are making private universities a better place. Thankfully, the government understands the supply side gap in tertiary education and have introduced several rules and regulations,. However these rules and regulations must take into considerations the various multi-layered challenges faced by the private universities. Bangladeshi private universities are starting with much lower funds and land compared to India. In the US, private universities are getting free land and government funding, and donors get tax break benefits. In Bangladesh, university regulators are from public universities. Understanding issues are critical for them. High tuition fees may be a problem,

but it is much less compared to India. Standardizing fees make no sense and quality cannot be ensured. Other sources of funding and more transparency is needed in this case. Due to this tuition fee based funding, greater accountability of teachers is present in private universities. His suggestions included affordable student dormitories, relative grading systems, stress counseling, learning approach based education, recognition of better quality and early internships. He also pointed out the advantages of the semester system, which allows students the opportunity to work as well.

Rapporteur:

Mr. Fahmidur Rahman Plabon
MSS Student (Economics)
East West University, Dhaka

Report on 2nd Workshop

17 August, 2017

Professor Imtiaz Ahmed and Dr Iftekhar Iqbal from University of Dhaka and Parvez Karim Abbasi from East West University, in collaboration with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Bangladesh, organized a second workshop on Private Universities in Bangladesh: Possibilities and Challenges at Hotel Lake Castle, Dhaka on 17 August, 2017. The program was chaired by Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Syed Saad Andaleeb, BRAC University. Professor Imtiaz Ahmed gave the opening remarks. Special remarks were made by Franziska Korn, Resident Representative, FES Bangladesh. The workshop aimed to create an interactive dialogue among faculty members from different private universities on challenges, opportunities and future directions in higher education in private universities, which lead to the ideas and suggestions that contributed to formulating an action oriented and implementable policy paper. About 34 faculty members from 12 different universities joined this program.

Professor Imtiaz Ahmed started the program by expressing his thanks. He said that the initiative started with University of Dhaka, and a book was published last year named “University of Dhaka: Making, Unmaking and Remaking” containing different perspectives on university issues from different scholars and faculty members. The University of Dhaka will be stepping into its 100th year soon, which is the primary cause for conducting the analysis in the first place. To the construction of the state, University of Dhaka contributed much more. Chittagong University has also agreed to follow the pattern of the study, and hopefully Rajshahi University will do the same. After a while, private universities were also included in this procedure. An interactive website will be launched soon to involve students, teachers and administrations and bring them all onto the same platform to share several ideas, including the future of classrooms, curricula and more. He added that a policy paper named “University of Dhaka: In search for excellence, issues and policy recommendations” was also generated from this book, and a series of dialogues with various major stakeholders, including civil society members, teachers, journalists, students, politicians, business people and others, were held. The objective of this study is to create a policy paper on private universities.

In her special remarks, Franziska Korn said FES has offices in more than 100 countries. While they started the journey with Bangladesh a long time ago, the official door of FES Bangladesh has opened in 2014. The intention was to find out more about Bangladesh and to closely work with experts in the country. FES is a political foundation. It is named after the first democratically elected German President Friedrich Ebert. FES activities are closely linked with social values. FES works on both social and political issues, including economic development, through research work, facilitating dialogues and regional cooperation. Education has always been one of the main focuses of FES, and that is the reason behind getting involved with this project. Education improves skills, which creates a better labor market and promotes economic growth. She raised some questions during her remarks, such as what are the needs of this young dividend education and what type of education needs to be provided by the state. After this, Parvez Karim Abbasi gave a brief presentation on draft policies.

In his remarks as chief guest, Dr. Syed Saad Andaleeb said he agreed with Ms Korn's comments. To solve the existing issues, the first job is to address them and work on them. There are more problems and challenges as well, and it has to be opened to all.

Summary of Teachers' Dialogue

Many have complained about the quality of students, but teachers should not be so negative in this case. In Bangladesh, students are not getting enough opportunities to learn new things in their academic curriculum. Private universities are providing excellent education services for the overall education sector and encouraging many students to not move abroad for tertiary level education. The value addition of higher education needs to be addressed at both individual and national levels. (Professor Dr. Sharif Nurul Ahkam, NSU)

Private universities bring affordable Western education to Bangladesh. It's a very positive contribution. Tuition fee driven financial models, lack of decision making power of cvice-chancellors and no differentiation between management and ownership are the major problems of private universities. As tuition fees is the only source of revenue, a rise in the

number of students always brings a fall in quality and raises the pressure on faculty members. (Abdur Rob Khan, Dean, NSU)

Private universities have to come forward and take over. Women's participation in higher level management has to be ensured. Some international institutions are rating universities in terms of women's participation. Day care centers have also become compulsory in many places. Faculty retention is the subject of economic structures. In response to the point about women's participation, another participant pointed out that women sometimes do not wish to participate in the decision making advisory bodies. (Masharrat Shamee Hossain, Senior Lecturer, NSU & Arzoo Ismail, Lecturer, ULAB)

There is a serious lacuna about research in Bangladesh. Good quality journals are missing. Starting of PhD programs, government funding and two semesters based education for better learning is needed. Opposing this statement, other participant added that Bangladesh has good quality journals. All that is needed is just confidence. There are ideas, talents, and theories in our country. UGC and other organizations like the national governing body related to law and pharmacy is also affecting university decisions. (Professor Dr. Mohammad Aminul Karim, IUB & Professor Dr Sharif Uddin Ahmed, NSU)

Where are we heading in terms of higher education? People with higher degrees are applying for low paid jobs. There may be a backlash soon if the situation does not change. (Md Ismail Hossain Nelay, Senior Lecturer, ULAB)

The government is providing funds to public universities, but not to private universities. Other universities are also joining in our education industry, like universities from Australia, Germany, and Finland. It is not about differentiating public education and private education, but the need to talk about the education industry as a whole. Things need to be done out of the box. A natural disaster is also affecting our education. (Dr. A. N. M Shibly Noman Khan, Associate Professor, IUB)

Student overload can turn the teaching profession into a tiring job and can hamper research work. Access and funding with leave are also necessary for teachers. Night MSS programs cannot maintain their quality. (Professor Dr Mizan R Khan, NSU)

Private universities are mostly market oriented, but it should be education oriented. Any kind of influence of corporate culture should not be allowed in the education system. Financial, HR and administrative activities are required to be more transparent and accessible. The culture of heavy handed dealings by administrations need to be modified. Deans and VCs are used by the administration to create pressure on teachers. Faculty members need to participate in the decision making process. Sexual harassment of female teachers is also a big factor in private universities. (Farhaan Uddin Ahmed, Lecturer, BRAC)

Foreign degrees are being introduced in Bangladesh. What will happen to our universities then? A public university may survive in this situation, but what will happen to the private university? (Dr. Goalm Ahmed Faruqui, Professor & Dean, Green University)

The quality of students is a concern for secondary education also. Higher studies need to add value to every student. Public universities are getting generous funds and land from the government. A level playing field is necessary in this case. The UGC has to help more. The imposition of rules might hurt private universities. Students from private universities have better opportunities for getting foreign scholarships. Private universities should introduce strong daytime Master's programmes. More research work will bring private universities in the right direction. Professional gatherings through seminars, joint trainings, workshops and through other ways are necessary. (Dr. Shahriar Khan, Professor & Dean, IUB)

In our society, parents usually invest on market oriented subjects in a private university. A maximum and minimum range across all private universities should be put in tuition fees. Teachers' evaluation and office hours are a good practice in private universities. (Touhida Tasnim, Assistant Professor, EWU)

Club activities are absent in public universities while in private universities, students are largely involved with this kind of activity. It improves their skills and gives them an advantage in the job market. Student from different countries sometimes give a different environment to some selective private universities. Empowerment of women is important, but women also need to come forward. (Tasnim Sorwar Tropa, Lecturer, CUB)

A healthy environment, motivation and campus environment is lacking in our campus. The true academic environment is not available in private universities. It is hampering research and academic life. The loss in terms of teachers' productivity is also an important issue in private universities. (Dr. A.K.M. Muzahidul Islam, Associate Professor, ULAB)

Teachers have to be proactive and need to learn about learners. Use of e-learning platforms is also necessary. Changing slides in power point is not e-learning. (Arzoo Ismail, Lecturer, ULAB)

Across the world, universities have two roles. One is creating intellectuals and another is producing human resources. Introducing diploma degrees, similar to degrees in universities in Australia, can be done. (Sariful Islam, Assistant Professor, AIUB)

Private universities are not democratic. Money and power are not properly distributed. Teachers need to raise their voices. Associations for teachers are needed. (Dr Zakir Hossain Raju, Director, Centre for Social Science, IUB)

In his closing remarks, Professor Andaleeb said working with these issues is not so easy. Lots of pressure is present here. The system is not perfect. The involvement of different parties' problem cannot be solved over time. Some burning questions related to this, like what to do for society, where we want to go, how many actually comes to universities for learning, are always present. Due to involvement of the UGC, ministry, industrial bodies and other organizations, the system gets interrupted. The main objective of universities is the success of students. Faculty members need to upgrade themselves continuously. VCs have to engage with all stakeholders, which is not always easy. For both cases, faculty members and students,

the theory of normal distribution works. To improve students, we need solid information and basic skill development courses. In the case of faculty members, the solutions of problems are participating in research and staff development. Industries are spending huge amounts of money to bring expertise from abroad. These skills need to be produced within our universities. Financial models to generate more funding for private universities are weak. However, it is also true that if students study abroad, they have much higher costs. Students need specialized Master's programs to get better knowledge. Where to invest money has always been a topic of debate. Campus environment is also related to infrastructure and cost issues, so it needs time to change. Again, teaching is a matter of skill. Staff development models are needed. Borrowing knowledge from other universities and borrowing concepts from western universities is not enough, they should be tested through research. Overseas ideas are not always workable. Good quality journals are always a pleasure to read. To judge the quality of journals, we could have a board or committee.

At this point of the discussion, Professor Imtiaz Ahmed also mentioned e-classes, vocational training, inter-university joint programs, relationships between universities and schools and other important issues.

In his thanksgiving speech, Dr Iftekhar Iqbal added that private universities are facing bigger challenges compared to public universities. If the illicit flow of funding can be invested in education and research, it can be a game changer. In some countries, there are industrial foundations that are supporting universities. To bring changes in our financial model, we have to look into these sources.

Rapporteur:

Mr. Fahmidur Rahman Plabon
MSS Student (Economics)
East West University, Dhaka

Report on 3rd Workshop

22 August, 2017

Professor Imtiaz Ahmed and Dr Iftekhar Iqbal from University of Dhaka and Parvez Karim Abbasi from East West University, in collaboration with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Bangladesh organized a workshop on Private Universities in Bangladesh: Possibilities and Challenges at Hotel Lake Castle, Dhaka on 22 August, 2017. The program was chaired by Vice Chancellor Professor M. Omar Rahman, Independent University, Bangladesh. Professor Imtiaz Ahmed gave the opening remarks and special remarks were made by Franziska Korn, Resident Representative, FES Bangladesh. This was the third workshop of the series with members of university administration, members of the board and civil society.

Professor Imtiaz Ahmed started the program with explaining how the journey started with University of Dhaka. A book was published last year named *“University of Dhaka: Making Unmaking Remaking”* containing different perspectives on university issues from different scholars and faculty members. By 2021, the University of Dhaka will step into its 100th year. Through reorientation and rethinking, if some of its outstanding problems are solved, other universities can also follow suit. A policy paper named *“University of Dhaka: In search for excellence, issues and policy recommendations”* was also generated from this book, and a series of dialogues with various major stakeholders, including civil society members, teachers, journalists, students, politicians, business people and others, was held. A rising number of students bring the concern in private universities. Chittagong University has also agreed to follow this pattern of research. Hopefully Rajshahi University and others will also do the same. An interactive website will be launched soon to involve students, teachers and administrations and bring them all onto the same platform to share their thoughts and ideas.

Franziska Korn said that the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is the oldest political foundation of Germany, and works closely on social democracy. FES is a non profit political foundation funded by the German government and independent of the party system. While their journey in Bangladesh started long before, they officially began operations here from 2014.

FES is named after the first democratically elected German President Friedrich Ebert and has offices in more than 100 countries. It places great importance on education, especially higher education, throughout the world, which is why they became involved with this project. She is expecting that the journey will continue through sharing ideas, learning, collaborations and suggestions.

Parvez Karim Abbasi gave a brief power point presentation on the findings. Following the presentation, Professor M. Omar Rahman said there are several problems regarding private universities. Some of them are structural problems and others are specific institutional problems. The major points of his remarks are:

- In Bangladesh, private universities are entirely dependent on tuition. Whereas in other countries, they tend to have endowment based funding systems. He mentioned the examples of Harvard University, Shiv Nadar University (India), Ashoka University (India), LUMS (Pakistan) and Habib University (Pakistan). He added that in other countries in the region like Sri Lanka, this endowment based funding process is also very common. To begin this process in Bangladesh, structural changes are needed, including tax break facilities for individuals and corporate philanthropists. As raising of tuition fees is a political issue, a law needs to be created.
- Land prices are continuing to rise and there is a shortage of land as well. Government intervention is necessary on this issue.
- Falling quality of secondary level students has to be addressed at the national level. It is hard for individual universities to tackle this issue.
- Some private universities have a visionary board of trustees. However, the government has massively exacerbated problems regarding boards of trustees through the Private Universities Act 2010. The law has endowed the boards with authority and power which by convention they never used to have. On the issue of governance, private universities need to be free to act. Political or factional influence by board of trustee members tend

to exist in the case of appointments, promotions, budget creation etc. The system will work better if boards of trustees are removed from academic decision making. The UGC needs to come forward regarding this issue.

- The decision making process of UGC needs to be faster with transparency, which can make excising system far better. Special supervision is needed in some cases, but it should not be slow.
- He encouraged focusing on employer needs by improving students' skills, otherwise it will be a failure. Employer needs will direct funds for research and infrastructure development.
- An effective association is needed, but it will be difficult to set a unique agenda through the association.
- Faculty members need to come forward for teachers' training and feel happy to participate. Only this participation based approach will create a better situation.
- In the near future, with the support of UGC, some top universities will have PhD programs. In the next five years, it will be given to selective universities.
- Research based universities usually only care about research. Universities in Bangladesh are teaching based. It will take time to bring changes in our universities. Teachers need to be given incentives to research, otherwise it will not be done regularly.
- Specialised teachers are needed for specialized topics. Relying on part time teachers is the best way to bring expertise from all over the world. However, universities need to follow the rules. It should not create an imbalance. At least two thirds of the faculty members should be full time.
- As our universities are based on a tuition driven model, it is easier for them to operate in Dhaka. Centralization is the reason behind this, which means this geographical imbalance is not going to change. Enough skilled teachers who have minimal international standards are not available. Technology may help to create access, but this is not a proper substitution.

At the end of his speech, he mentioned that he is personally very optimistic about higher studies in Bangladesh. The younger generation can massively affect the economy. Privatization of higher education is needed but a minimum level of public sector involvement also has to be maintained. The existing system is okay, but it can perform better. In some issues, government intervention is necessary. Soon, automation will hit job markets in our nation, so universities need to provide lifetime survival skills to students. Higher studies make better humans, but nowadays lack of tolerance is the biggest problem.

In response to audience questions, he said that research needs incentives. All over the world, this is the strategy. Teaching, research and student counseling is hard to do in a short time and under so much pressure. The administration has to address this and also needs to understand the slow output of research. Any kind of prescribed top-down policy is not feasible for teacher training. The UGC can be reshaped and motivated for better performance.

Dr. Zafrullah Chowdhury, trustee member, Gono Bishwabidyalay, stated that in Gono Bishwabidyalay, the annual University budget decisions are taken by faculty members, including regarding the purchasing of land. Getting teachers to work outside of Dhaka is very difficult. Teachers are not often interested in staying in the field for a long time. Parents sometimes oppose it as well. Promotion of student councils, sports for mental recreation, and faster decision making by the UGC is also very important. Expecting no opposition is the biggest government support. Political pressure on universities is a problem.

In conclusion, Professor Omar Rahman added that diversification in addressing the problems is necessary to solve common problems. Young faculty members can sit together and discuss how to solve these issues. Teacher associations are also needed. It is important to look at the education system as one single unit rather than separating private university education and public university education.

In his thanksgiving speech, Dr Iftekhar Iqbal spoke of how to define this youth demographic dividend. Should the youth be addressed in terms of batches or semesters only? To bring

qualitative improvement, the pressure of extensive exams throughout the semester needs to be reduced. It may sound philosophical. Money that is leaving the country needs to be invested in the education sector. Existing budgets are not enough for research. Collaborations between universities and the corporate sector are mandatory for fund raising.

Rapporteur:

Mr. Fahmidur Rahman Plabon
MSS Student (Economics)
East West University, Dhaka

Report on 4th Workshop

23 October 2017

Introduction

The workshop commenced with Prof. Dr. Imtiaz thanking Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) for arranging the workshop on tertiary education reforms in Bangladesh. Professor of International Relations of the University of Dhaka, Dr. Imtiaz Ahmed stressed greatly on the importance on education. According to him, there is nothing called public or private in this arena. Germany is a good example of the success of public universities. On the other hand, United States is a good example of the success of private universities. Both public and private universities have good sides and bad sides. For Bangladesh, it is time to deal with education, especially tertiary education. Since there is minimum interaction between public and private universities in Bangladesh, it is high time to start these interactions.

Prof. Dr. Imtiaz mentioned the book named *“University of Dhaka- Making, Unmaking Remaking”*, edited by Professor Dr Imtiaz Ahmed and Dr. Iftekhar Iqbal of University of Dhaka, published by Prothoma under the patronization of FES. Later on, the book inspired a policy paper, along with a series of workshops with civil society, students, political parties and business people, regarding public universities and what a public university should be. During the exercise regarding public universities, almost 200 consultants were engaged. Other public universities (Chittagong University and Rajshahi University) were also involved to understand their views on tertiary education reforms. Gradually, the initiative was expanded to include private universities, since more and more students are joining private universities these days. Now, private universities have more students than public universities. Thus, the initiative of working on the challenges and possibilities of private universities was also started. At the initial stage, a full day discussion with private university students was organised, where they were able to share their opinions. Students were happy with the circulated draft policy papers and also added new items there. Secondly, a workshop was held with the faculty members of private universities. Faculty members were also enthusiastic since this was the first time

that a group of private universities met under one roof. The faculty members contributed many imported issues to those that were already flagged in the draft policy paper, which is being prepared to be submitted to the Ministry of Education of Bangladesh. Following this, a workshop was held with the management or officials of private universities. Dr. Imtiaz mentioned that the University Grants Commission (UGC) is the umbrella for all the private universities. He emphasized that it is high time to have proper interactions between public and private universities.

A flagship program will be held on 15th January 2018, where representatives from all the public and private universities will be in the same room. That assembly on higher education will have around 100 personnel from different public and private universities. Sir Fazle Hasan Abed will be the keynote speaker of the program.

Franziska Korn, the Resident Representative of FES Bangladesh, was then welcomed by Dr. Imtiaz. She warmly greeted everyone and thanked them for their presence at the workshop. She explained that Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is a non-profit German foundation funded by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, with headquarters in Bonn and Berlin.

The focus of FES in Asia is to promote democratic and socially just socioeconomic development. The Bangladesh office of FES is based in Banani and was registered by the NGO Affairs Bureau in March 2013. Officially, FES started their activities in Bangladesh in 2014.

Franziska Korn said that education always shapes nations and nations shape societies, which is why FES puts great emphasis on education. Private universities are getting more and more important in Germany as well as Bangladesh, and higher education is especially important in Bangladesh. She stressed on the need for quality education along with quantity education.

After this, all the discussants or participants introduced themselves. Then, Mr. Parvez Karim Abbasi gave a presentation on the policy paper, with thoughtful inputs from the workshop.

Paper Presentation

The presentation is a snapshot of the draft policy paper prepared by the authors Professor Dr. Imtiaz Ahmed, University of Dhaka, Dr. Iftekhar Iqbal, University of Dhaka and Mr. Parvez Karim Abbasi, East West University.

Presenter Parvez Karim Abbasi started with emphasizing the demographic dividend of Bangladesh. The government of Bangladesh, World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), different national and international NGOs, etc. actively work for the betterment of primary, secondary and tertiary education in Bangladesh.

Democratization of education gives rise to private university education. Other factors which contribute to the rise in private university education, according to the authors, are as follows:

- Rise in number of HSC passing students
- Infrastructural constraints in public universities
- Political violence in public universities
- Changes in government policy
- Private University Act of 1992

Projected expansion of students in private universities by 2020 is 1,085,800. Thus, the number of students in private universities is increasing compared to that of public universities.

Objectives of the presentation were:

- Identification and prioritization of challenges, possibilities and policy recommendations of private universities in Bangladesh.
- Focus on three important stakeholders, which are students, teachers and board of trustees/higher management.

The presenter gave a brief idea about the outcome of the workshops on private universities and its education, which were conducted with students, teachers and boards of trustees/higher management respectively.

Students' perspectives on private education (positive aspects)

- Better teacher-student ratio is one of the strong suits of private universities.
- Accountability of teachers through office hours and regular classes.
- Party based student politics is absent.
- Higher degree of security for students, especially for female students, compared to public universities. Forty percent of private university students are female (Source: UGC Chairman).

Students' perspectives on private education (negative aspects)

- Higher tuition fees with not enough facilities comparatively.
- Absence of permanent campus.
- Absence of facilities in private universities. Usually, private university students compare the facilities provided by their university with the available facilities of public universities and feel that private universities are lagging behind in terms of transport facilities, residence availability, provision of extra-curricular activities, presence of sports fields etc.
- Insufficient academic counselors.
- High levels of stress due to high tuition fees, course load and workload.
- Students of private universities are lacking in social recognition and acceptance, especially in rural areas.
- Limited scope of student representation.
- Inherent threat of radicalization exists.
- Negative bias of media.

Private university teachers' perspectives (teachers from Dhaka and outside Dhaka)

- Decline in the quality of students. Lack of basic knowledge of English, Math and Bengali. A university will be as good as its raw materials, which are its students.
- High pressure on teachers to raise pass rates.

- Heavy work load of teachers. They need to take three to four courses in a semester, need to maintain certain office hours for the students, and need to publish research publications.
- Arbitrary hiring and firing.
- No associations or unions. Lack of effective representation of teachers.

Management perspectives

- Limited sources of funding within a tuition driven model of education.
- Absence of tax holidays and concessions for buying land.
- Lack of tie-ups with the private sector on research and development.
- Absence of effective associations.
- Lack of transparency and accountability within boards of trustees. Sometimes boards act like a family business.
- Infighting within boards of trustees and weak Vice Chancellors.
- Problems with UGC such as interference and lengthy processes. Opening of a single course takes 3 to 4 years. Amendments of existing curricula take almost one full year.
- Absence of PhD programs. Leading private universities possess the capabilities of running MPhil and PhD programs. In that case, a more research-oriented environment can be created.
- Geographical imbalance. Ninety percent of the private universities are situated in Dhaka. Often, there are potential students in the peripheral or excluded areas of Bangladesh, but there is a shortage of potential faculty members and as a result, management cannot open new private universities in these areas and they end up being localized in the centre.
- Lack of institutional mechanisms for sharing of resources. If these existed, costs would have been reduced and better economies of scale could have been achieved.
- Greater reliance on part-time teachers.

- Lack of effective teaching know-how amongst new teachers since fresh graduates are appointed as lecturers and many universities do not provide orientations to the new faculty members.

Discussants' Session

Participants of the workshop offered their valuable comments on the presentation and the current scenario of private universities along with recommendations

- In order to start new course curriculum and amend the existing courses, UGC permission is required and this is a very lengthy and time-consuming process. One participant suggested that private universities should be allowed to follow the system that public universities follow, where introduction of new course and curriculum are approved by an academic council, without needing any approval from the University Grants Commission
- Some leading private universities are capable of conducting MPhil and PhD programs and they should be allowed to offer those degrees following due procedures.
- Universities have obligations towards parents, since they pay the tuition fees. Eighty percent of students of private universities come from rural areas.
- There is an absence of tax holidays. Land cannot be kept as collateral to get funds from banks.
- There is transparency in the management of private universities.
- Association of Private Universities in Bangladesh (APUB) should be strengthened.
- UGC is trying to involve one of their members in the finance committees of private universities. However, the management is solely liable to the university. No justification is found for involving one UGC member to internal matters of private university management authorities.
- Private universities need to be united.

- Emphasis should be given on the research-driven model of education, along with the existing tuition driven model, since faculty members need to do research as well as to teach.
- There is lack of understanding between the private universities and the bureaucrats. In order to get permission for research, more than one year is required, even if it is self-funded.
- All 95 private universities do not have the same potentials and capacities. Some leading private universities can be permitted to conduct PhD programs, since some of them have national and global partnerships in terms of research, as mentioned earlier
- Partnerships between public and private universities or between departments should be established in order to strengthen their relationships and understand each other's viewpoints.
- Private universities are accountable to both students and parents, but more to the students.
- Emphasis should be given to the quality of board members, saying whether a board is composed of family members or not is irrelevant. Rather, it is important to have quality amongst the board members. Private universities can be renowned and efficient too in spite of having family members within the board.
- Instead of helping, the UGC and government try to control private universities.
- The issue of generalization of all the private universities by UGC instead of monitoring the inefficient and poor quality private universities was raised. If required, the UGC should shut down those universities instead of putting the efficient and inefficient universities into one group.
- In general there have been positive views on the public sector and negative opinions of the private sector. Even the media is also negatively biased against private universities to some extent, because when they report on private universities, the education reporter

collects information from the UGC or low profile private universities and assume that is the overall scenario of all private universities.

- Quality of education, research and learning systems should be prioritized instead of valuing the possession of land or having a permanent campus.
- Students of private universities are non-violent compared to that of public universities, especially when protesting against any issue.
- Private universities transform poor quality students into a better product, and the opposite takes place in public universities in most cases.
- Instead of focusing on all the bad news from poor quality universities, the quality of public universities (other than DU) should be taken into account too, since the quality of all the public universities is not the same as the University of Dhaka.
- The UGC always formulates policies for private universities based on the experiences of public universities, which may not always bring positive outcome.
- After 20 years, many of the top 10 universities of Bangladesh will be private universities.
- The UGC needs to be divided into two wings - one for public and another for private universities, in order to facilitate and expedite their activities.
- The issues regarding low manpower at the UGC should be solved.
- Sometimes political leaders buy permits for private universities and later sell them to other parties.
- Sometimes private universities run like a family business. Different stakeholders retire and become professors at universities, which sometimes reduces the quality of those universities.
- The absence of political party politics is a limitation to some extent, since students are deprived of acquiring leadership skills. If students refrain from student activities, club

activities and extra-curricular activities, then they can easily be radicalized.

- The amount of money spent by the government for a single student of a public university is higher than the tuition fee charged for a student of a private university.
- Since Bangladesh Studies is compulsory in private universities, students possess knowledge on the Bangladeshi context.
- The role of APUB (Association of Private Universities of Bangladesh) should be strengthened, since the members of APUB know each other and can take actions for any inappropriate activities. If APUB punishes poor quality private universities, the government will not claim that private universities sell certificates.
- It should be obvious to an outsider that there is relative transparency in private universities.
- The UGC should supervise private universities only if it offers monetary support to them.
- Many students of private universities belong to families where they are the first generation pursuing tertiary education. Among them, most of the students possess weak secondary education.
- From the first semester, emphasis should be given towards the academic improvement of students.
- Thirty percent of students in their first semesters end up in probation. Some universities provide a good number of workshops for their improvement.
- Courses should be formulated in such a way that students develop skills.
- Private universities lack senior faculty members. It is very difficult to find qualified professors and associate professors.
- Eligible private universities should get the authority to introduce PhD programs. PhDs will create a research environment in private universities.

- Due to lack of permanent campuses, private universities cannot get help from Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project.
- A consortium of different private universities can create a friendly environment for working together.
- In order to tackle the shortage of senior faculty members, private universities should have PhD programs.
- Inclusion of UGC member in the boards of trustees or finance committees can create a crisis.
- Institutional Quality Assurance Cell program of the UGC was appreciated.
- Introduction of a uniform fee structure among all the private universities will be a great challenge towards the improvement of tertiary education in Bangladesh.
- More and more private universities are being established. 150 new private universities are about to seek permission to operate in the education sector. Competition among these universities should be healthy and mutually productive for the higher education sector in general.
- Formulation of ways to transparently raise funds for private universities is possible.
- Being the registrar at a new private university, one has to face issues regarding course curriculum and hiring faculty members.
- Private universities need to have their representatives in the UGC to protect their interests, since the number of students and faculty members are higher in private universities compared to public universities and they are continuously increasing in scale.

Rapporteur:

Ms. Nashia Zaman
Lecturer, Department of Japanese Studies
University of Dhaka.

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