

Higher Education at Private Universities in Bangladesh: Problems and Prospects

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Abstract: Every year the majority of students were deprived of higher education in public universities of Bangladesh due to limitations of available seats. Considering the issue, the government took an initiative to establish private universities by promulgating a new law titled Private University Act in 1992. Currently, Bangladesh has 3 international universities, 40 public universities and 95 private universities. Private universities have a great role in a developing country like Bangladesh for developing human capital as it is known that a well-educated and well-trained population drives a nation to rapid economic growth. Bangladesh has limited natural resources; however, it has a huge population. In this context, private universities can really play a vital role in creating knowledge-based economy by providing proper education, knowledge and skills to a large number of graduates. It is true that private universities are indispensable for fulfilling the growing demand of the higher education in Bangladesh, but a good many of them are unable to reach an acceptable standard in terms of teaching-learning, teachers, and market acceptability of their graduates. Most of the low-performing institutions have profit making tendency only. They lack good will and at the same time have been exploiting students. The government, Ministry of Education and University Grants Commission (UGC) should perform their role properly in helping the universities by giving the necessary guidance for overcoming the existing shortcomings, especially regarding infrastructural development, teaching-learning environment and quality education.

Keywords: Private higher education, Human capital, Problems, Prospects

Introduction

The establishment of private universities in Bangladesh was an unavoidable reality of expanding higher education. The rapid growth of higher education throughout the

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world is undoubtedly the influence of globalization and knowledge economy (Gibbons, 1998; The World Bank, 2000; Robertson, 2009). Bangladesh being a developing country is not far from the flow of developing human capital as a well-educated population can propel a nation towards rapid economic growth (UGC: 2006). Moreover, “human capital plays a more important role in generating income and wealth in an economy or society than the traditional factors of production, e.g. land (natural resources), capital and machinery” (Alam, Haque & Siddique, 2007: 14). For a country like Bangladesh, human capital is essential for a sustainable economic development (Monem & Baniamin, 2010; Shamsuddoha & Khanam, 2003). In this regard, private universities can play a significant role in developing skilled manpower through education. In addition, private universities may supply the requisite number of skilled personnel, for example engineers, teachers, lawyers, business and management professionals, civil servants, and other professionals to sustain our economic growth. Besides, by developing skilled manpower who are capable of working beyond our geographical boundary, private universities can help the country to move from a vicious cycle of poverty to a virtuous cycle of economic growth.

According to BANBEIS (2016), nearly half of the students (45.06%) receive higher education in private universities; therefore, the role of private universities towards developing human capital cannot be denied.

Bangladesh Education Statistics 2016				
Type of	No. of	No. of	No. of	Student
Public	38	12748	452192	54.94
Private	92	14986	370910	45.06
Total	130	27,734	823102	100

Although a great many private universities (95 presently and 68.84% of the total universities) are existing in Bangladesh, it is still uncertain about how many of them are providing quality education and fulfilling the objectives of higher education. Moreover, private universities are facing various problems that are the real challenges to achieving the set objectives of our National Education Policy. Therefore, it is undoubtedly necessary to investigate the current state of higher education at private universities in Bangladesh. For the purpose of examining the present situation of higher education at private universities, this article reviews the literature on higher education in Bangladesh.

History and background

There are three different types of universities in Bangladesh, namely public, private and international universities. Public universities are funded by the government but

run as autonomous organizations while private universities are established under the Private University Act 1992 amended in 2010 and managed by a private governing body. However, international universities are neither government-funded nor established under the Private University Act although they are managed by a private governing body. Bangladeshi universities are affiliated with the University Grants Commission (UGC). UGC was established under the Presidential Order (P.O. No 10 of 1973) of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. However, the first public university, University of Dhaka, was established in 1921. Although Bangladesh was dominated by public universities, considering the social demands for higher education, the government's inability to provide the necessary funds to establish required number of public universities and multiple aspects of education, the government took the initiative to establish private universities by promulgating the Private University Act in 1992 and in the same year the first private university was established according to the Act. It was said in the act that private universities were necessary "to meet the increasing demand of, and to extend pervasively, higher education in the country, to facilitate the access of the general public to higher education and to create in this way a class of skilled persons" (Bangladesh Gazette Extraordinary, 1992).

Objectives of higher education

The aims and objectives of higher education may differ from country to country. Developed and developing countries have different challenges in the development of human capital and objectives in higher education. Education has some common objectives, namely developing knowledge, life skills, attitudes and values of the students to change the society in a productive and sustainable way. Besides, every nation has its own objectives by considering its socio-political situations, resources and priorities. However, quality education is necessary to achieve the general and specific goals set by any particular nation. In the context of Bangladesh, quality higher education is very crucial to develop professionals in every field and to prepare globally employable skilled workers so that they can contribute to the development of human capital along with the sovereignty and integrity of the country as said in the National Education Policy 2010 (MOE, 2010).

Problems in private higher education institutions

The principal objective of education is the development of the whole individual and surely this is not an easy task as it depends on a number of factors. At present the

challenge for higher education in Bangladesh is to reform, create and develop systems that prepare an individual to work in a borderless economy and live in a global society. In other words, our educational institutions need to produce global citizens and this is one of most serious challenges we face in higher education. Globalization is a current trend in higher education that affects the basic fabric and purpose of education. Because of globalization, our private higher education institutions have adopted the corporate nature and are operated on the principles of cost reduction and profit maximization though education should encourage and represent openness, inquiry, diversity, research and limitless learning. Additionally, many private universities bear profit-making mentality that changes the motto of education. As a result, the learning environment is severely hampered. It is true that the emergence and the rapid growth of private universities in Bangladesh have taken a prodigious shape in recent years. However, there is a widespread allegation of providing easy-to-get degrees against some private universities. Moreover, a good number of universities lack suitable infrastructure for teaching-learning. In addition, some universities charge very high tuition fees and a great many of them provide poor quality teaching.

Infrastructure

Infrastructural development is essential to ensure the fundamental facilities and services required for higher education and research. A well-structured education friendly campus, classrooms with all modern facilities, a well-stocked library, laboratories, auditorium, playgrounds, etc. are fundamental to ensure quality education. However, only 13 out of 92 private universities are operating academic activities on their own campuses and 2 universities have fulfilled all terms and conditions and achieved the permanent certificate from the government but other 52 universities could not meet the expected level in 5-23 years (UGC, 2017). Although almost 90% of the public universities that are in academic operation are providing accommodation facilities for students, only a few private universities are providing that facilities (BANBEIS, 2016).

Courses in private universities

Private universities offer a limited number of courses (Monem & Baniamin, 2010), especially the courses that have high profitability with low investments. Some of the common courses are business administration, computer sciences, engineering, English, law, etc. (Khan, Mridha & Barua, 2009). Actually, all the courses satisfy

only the present job market and for-profit business. Considering a balanced and comprehensive education, private universities should also teach history, philosophy, social sciences, literature, religious studies and so on. Thus, education may fulfill the individual and social demands. So, if we fail to understand the multi-dimensions of education, these for-profit private universities will only partially contribute to national and individuals' development.

High tuition fees

Most of the private universities charge very high tuition fees to generate a large surplus for their accelerated growth. As a result, students from wealthy families only get places in private universities but the students from poor and middleclass families cannot afford private higher education (Mazumder, 2014). In this way, private higher education is encouraging elitism.

Lack of qualified teachers

The successful implementation of any syllabus depends largely on teachers' knowledge and skills as this will determine whether they will translate it into classroom practices. Moreover, effective teaching is essential to achieve the objectives of the syllabus and it requires teachers' proper knowledge and skills. Although proper teaching-learning environment is an essential prerequisite to effective teaching, it is useless without knowledgeable and skilled teachers. At present, there are 4824 (32.19%) Part-time Lecturers, 6723 Lecturers (44.86%), 2193 (14.63%) Assistant Professors, 572 (3.81%) Associate Professors, 737 (4.91%) Professors out of a total of 14986 teachers in 92 private universities (BANBEIS, 2016). The data show that 77.05% of the total teachers are Lecturers and Part-time Lecturers and only 8.72% are Professors and Associate Professors. On the other hand, there are 2894 Lecturers (22.70%), 4173 Assistant Professors (32.73%), 2117 Associate Professors (16.60%) and 3564 Professors (27.96%) out of a total of 12746 teachers in 38 public universities. It is very interesting that 77.30% of the teachers in public universities are Professors, Associate Professors and Assistant Professors while 77.05% of the teachers in private universities are Lecturers and Part-time Lecturers. In most cases, private universities employ Lecturers and Part-time Lecturers along with retired Professors to reduce costs. It is also seen from the data that a number of universities do not have the required number of experienced teachers and they depend mainly on junior and inexperienced faculties as well as part-time lecturers. Thus, the

lack of qualified teachers is a real threat to ensuring and expanding private higher education in Bangladesh (Monem & Baniamin, 2010).

Lack of research

Although the National Education Policy 2010 lays great stress on research at higher education level to innovate new ideas and expand the body of knowledge, to find the problems of the society and the state and the solutions to them (MOE, 2010), only 64 private universities out of 92 spent more or less on research and the rest (30.43%) had no budget for research. The universities spent an average of just \$ 0.175 million on research in 2016 (UGC, 2017).

Profit-making mentality and lack of ethics

Private universities have become highly aggressive in all academic and marketing activities to make money (Mazumder, 2014). They should not forget that they have the social responsibilities. So, they should come out from the commodification of higher education that has turned the universities into knowledge factories. They should also think of the social balance, equality, creating opportunities for disadvantaged people overlooking the profit-seeking mentality.

Quality control

It is a great initiative by the government of Bangladesh that has approved 'The Bangladesh Accreditation Council Act, 2016' to ensure the high standards of higher education in Bangladesh. Previous to this, there was no body to regulate higher education institutions and to ensure the quality of higher education except the weak supervision of the UGC. In most cases, the UGC just reports some facts and irregularities of the universities. In fact, the function of the UGC is very limited (Wadood, 2006). However, it is expected that the Bangladesh Accreditation Council will be successful in helping the private universities to strive for the highest standards. Besides, the Ministry of Education (MOE), the Bangladesh Accreditation Council and the UGC should work properly to ensure the high standard of education in Bangladesh.

Prospects of private higher education

Private universities of Bangladesh have very good prospects as they are contributing a lot to producing human capitals by providing market-oriented quality education along with employment opportunities.

Market oriented education

A good number of private universities have designed academic programs to satisfy the needs of the present job market and have been successful in producing skilled manpower. Moreover, they are working in collaboration with different foreign universities, industries and corporate fields. Besides, some private universities are doing continuous needs analysis to improve the existing programs and to offer the most suitable courses with a view to preparing our graduates to meet the global challenges of the 21st century (Mazumder, 2014). In fact, it is necessary for the educators to satisfy the needs of both sets of customers, namely the students and the employers (Elaine & Kenneth, 1995). Indeed, private higher education sector is playing an essential role in formulating the need-based higher education.

Producing human capitals

Private universities are undoubtedly contributing to the economic and social development of this country by producing a large number of skilled graduates every year who are employed both at home and abroad (Islam & Salma, 2016). Moreover, they have the scope to provide more market-oriented quality education by utilizing their own funds in improving the teaching-learning environment and in research. In this way, they can produce world-class graduates who will be able to secure their positions in the competitive job market of the current world.

Quality education in private universities

Quality of education at higher education level has been a concern in recent years. Nevertheless, it is praiseworthy that some private universities have been able to reach and maintain high standards of quality education (Islam & Salma, 2016; Asaduzzaman, Hossain & Rahman, 2013; Akareem & Hossain, 2012). Moreover, they have been successful in attracting foreign students with their quality education. According to UGC (2017), the number of foreign students in public universities in the year 2016 was 355 while in the same year, the number of foreign students in private universities was 1927, i.e. five times more than public universities. In addition, private universities have been able to attract 3159 PhD-holder faculty members (Full-Time-1292 and Part-Time- 1867) by ensuring a pleasant teaching-learning environment (UGC, 2017). Besides, the teacher-student ratio in private universities is presently 1: 22 (UGC, 2017). Furthermore, up-to-date academic programs, the modern methods of teaching, well-equipped classrooms, facilities, learning

environment, security and good management attract students to enroll in private universities (Islam & Salma, 2016; Mazumder, 2014).

Employment prospects

The graduates of private universities have good employment prospects at home and abroad as they are in demand for the education they receive and the knowledge and skills they gain at this level. It is a fact that the majority of students enrolled in private universities are not the best of the whole lot; however, they finally become competent to carry out their professional responsibilities as they go through a rigorous process of achieving academic excellence. As a result, they become successful in getting jobs in a highly competitive market. Moreover, many private universities have collaborations with different organizations, companies and industries that employ the graduates from those universities. Thus, private universities have created new job opportunities for the graduates.

Conclusion

Higher education plays a pivotal role in developing skilled manpower who can really contribute to accelerating the economic growth. In the context of Bangladesh, private higher education sector has an important role in producing competent graduates so that they can assist in creating the knowledge-based modern economy. This is the fact that we have to prepare people for the jobs of the future. Therefore, it is necessary for us to ensure quality education so that our students can acquire necessary skills to compete in the global market. Nevertheless, we should not forget that education is not all about jobs. As Cookson (1994) says:

We are challenged to choose between the fragmented consciousness of the modern materialistic mind and the humanistic vision of the whole emphatic and productive mind. We need a transcendent view of education, the elements of which include individual responsibility, the centrality of individual worth, equality, peace, and the primacy of the child's physical, intellectual, and spiritual rights (p.121).

Essentially, education should develop the intellectual, physical, spiritual, moral, and emotional potentials of the individuals to create a balanced society and if we fail to understand the multi-dimensions of education, the for-profit institutions will only partially contribute to national and individuals' development. In higher education context, the basic objectives of the universities are providing education, conducting

research and creating new knowledge. However, many universities fail to conduct research due to lack of qualified teachers, sufficient funds and facilities. Moreover, the mentality of gaining a high return on the investments most often limits the activities of creating new knowledge through the investment in research and providing quality education. An essentially optimistic view of the future of private higher education prevails among the educationists as some private universities are performing excellently, although a large number of them are still unable to reach the required standard. If private universities are properly regulated and can meet the objectives of higher education, the higher education sector will undoubtedly contribute to the overall development of the country.

Recommendations

- Private universities should ensure physical facilities like well-structured and education-friendly campuses, adequate classrooms with modern facilities, rich and impressive libraries, well-equipped laboratories for research and lab-based courses, internet facilities, residential facilities, in-door and out-door games facilities, gymnasias, health centers, requisite number of auditoriums for curricular and co-curricular activities, etc.
- Private universities should make sure of qualified teachers. They should not depend on part-time, junior and inexperienced faculty members.
- The courses in private universities are very limited and usually satisfy only the present job market and for-profit business. However, education always encourages and represents openness, inquiry, diversity, research and limitless learning. So, for developing a nation with a balanced and comprehensive education, private universities should also offer courses like physics, chemistry, biology, history, philosophy, social sciences, literature, religious studies and so on. Thus, they may fulfill the individual and social demands along with the multi-dimensional purposes of education. Otherwise, these for-profit private universities will only partially contribute to national and individual development.
- Private universities usually charge high tuition fees. In a developing democratic country like Bangladesh private universities should accommodate students from all social classes by moderating tuition fees or else they will produce a group of elitists that may lead to social inequalities.

- The government of Bangladesh, the Ministry of Education, and the University Grants Commission (UGC) have very little control over the quality of education in both public and private universities. The authorities should immediately concentrate on quality control issues of the universities. Even they ought to monitor the processing of inputs to final products.
- It is a matter of great regret that though the government is providing all the necessary supports (e.g. interest free easy loan or low interest loan, land or other facilities) to foster industrial growth, they are unenthusiastic to provide such facilities to the private higher education sector. So, this is the high time to change the government policy for the expansion and sustainable development of this sector.
- Private universities should come out from the commodification of higher education that has turned the universities into knowledge factories. They should keep in mind that they have the social responsibilities. So, they have to overlook the profit-seeking mentality and ensure the social balance, equality, opportunities for disadvantaged people in the society. They should focus on the research for producing new knowledge for better future of the universe rather than certificate-based education.

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