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Developing Quality Private Universities in Bangladesh: Empirical Evidence from Selected Private Universities

Dr. Abdul Awal Khan¹ and Md. Mahbubur Rahman²

ABSTRACT

The study aims at exploring required platforms for developing quality private universities in Bangladesh. It employs a range of qualitative research tools to explore the central question of the research and its specific objectives. It examines a few essential criteria for designing an interview guide and a checklist to collect data from the purposively selected informants. At the outset, we selected a number of leading private universities from a total of 107 (as of May 2022) across the country for finding suitable informants. By applying non-random, convenient sampling, we selected ten leading private universities, considering their contribution to quality education and research, such as Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology (AUST), American International University Bangladesh (AIUB), Brac University, East-West University (EWU), International Standard University (ISU), Independent University Bangladesh (IUB), North South University (NSU), Southeast University, United International University (UIU), and University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB). We carried out each interview for approximately an hour to collect necessary data central to the study objectives from the informants. The study revealed that the various entities and institutions, for instance, the Education Ministry of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB), the University Grants Commission (UGC), the Board of Trustees (BoT), the higher echelons of university management, comprising the Vice-Chancellor, and the Treasurer, play a vital role in developing a quality university in the private sector. The paper makes evidence-based recommendations regarding the formation of a 'search committee' for the selection of Vice-Chancellor and Treasurer who will brilliantly guide a private university in cultivating quality education, promoting scholarly research, and producing competent graduates

KEY WORDS

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¹ Professor and Dean, Faculty of Business Studies (FBS), International Standard University (ISU)

² Associate Professor, DBA and Director, CRDP, International Standard University (ISU)

1. Introduction

Education is deemed an inalienable human right, and the overall economic growth and sustainable development of a country's trajectory are inextricably bound up with education, particularly education at the tertiary level. Higher education plays a vital role in producing human capital and skilled labor (Khan and Rahman, 2022). Bangladesh has a relatively young population (Rahman et al., 2021), with a median age of 26.4 years (BBS, 2021). Research shows that about 20 percent of the population falls in the age group between 15 and 24 years. A recent study (Khan and Rahman, 2022) reveals that about 23 percent of the students who pass the HSC examination get admitted to public and private universities every year. Considering the current trend, it is probable that in 2022 about 362,000 students were admitted to first-year courses at higher-level academic institutions. It had exerted tremendous pressure on tertiary-level education in Bangladesh.

Since the enactment of the Private Universities Act of 1992, the country has witnessed significant growth in the number of educational platforms over the recent years, mainly through the emergence of a large number of universities in the private sector. Yet, this growth has a downside to it, too, as rapid expansion entails a risk of

compromise between quality and expenses. However, the combined effect is a vibrant education sector with a healthy rivalry among competing institutions. Undoubtedly, the main beneficiary is the student community that gains access to a wider platform of selection with the comparative cost advantage of domestic study over studying abroad. Thus, the society and the nation are the ultimate beneficiaries (Chowdhury, 2004). Surprisingly, about 60% of these universities are located in the metropolitan area of Dhaka. While in the year 2000, there were only 17 of these universities, today the number has reached to 109.

Obviously, this growth rate seems very high in consideration of the country's need for higher education and the costs involved. However, one familiar feature of a few of these universities is how they ensure quality and follow the most acceptable method. They offer four-year bachelor's degree programs with credit-based courses which has created a popular appeal in Bangladesh. Still, the regulators and the stakeholders have concerns about the service quality, design, and costs incurred (Alam et al., 2007). As of to-day, there has been almost none to regulate private universities and assure the quality of education other than through a kind of supervision of

the University Grants Commission (UGC) for reporting some facts only, to the government (Alam et al., 2007). The issue requires close attention and is, therefore, very important for our private universities to ensure the required degree of excellence.

2. Tertiary-level Higher Education in Bangladesh: The Beginning

Recent studies reveal that the post-liberation first decade (1972-1981) was one of the best eras of higher education in the history of Bangladesh. Although a very few public universities generated and shared knowledge with students, the academic standard they ensured during this period was appreciable. However, this decade passed through various hardships and turmoil, and the country's education system was disturbed by the anti-liberation forces. Yet the overall standard of education was not severely affected. At the university level, the teaching and learning situation remained more or less the same as before liberation. The second decade (1982-1991) experienced a major departure in the academic atmosphere of the country followed by the capture of political power through a military coup by General H.M Ershad. Consequent on mass uprisings against the military regime, students along with the whole community, joined a 5-point movement. Particularly, university

students started to engage more in the anti-Ershad movement than in their studies. The ultimate result was frustrating for the academic life of university students: almost all of them, on an average, lost 2 to 3 academic years of their life due to session jams. Along with their parents, they were deeply frustrated. Despite their earnest endeavor, the teachers failed to retrieve the situation.

In this situation, a large number of university-level students (about 10,000 every year), left the country for higher studies abroad, especially at Indian Universities. The consequence was huge drainage to our hard-earned foreign currency and a rapid fall in the quality of teaching in both graduate and undergraduate programs. The fall of the Ershad regime at the fag-end of this decade brought in some hopes of recovery. At this stage, the then-public universities (only four) started concentrating on their own academic programs. Many of the teachers got engaged in both teaching and research but a few happened to turn into political activists for their personal benefit. This gave birth to campus politics resulting in sharp divisions and conflicts among teachers.

The third decade (1992-2001) started with renewed expectations of a

better academic environment in the universities. The establishment of a new democratic environment opened a door expecting development. The then government, in order to check the large-scale migration of students for higher studies abroad, passed an Act in 1992 allowing the establishment of Private Universities in the country. Perhaps the government also well understood the limitations of public universities in meeting the rising needs of the students seeking quality higher education. This attempt by the government proved quite timely and encouraging. Private universities started emerging, thereby helping reduce the migration of students and also 'throwing some light at the other end of the tunnel' regarding better quality education at the tertiary level.

The situation started to grow in such a way that the minimization of the limitations of public universities in accommodating the rising number of students seeking higher education and also the guarantee of much-expected quality in teaching and learning became highly significant. Consequently, the growth and development of universities in the private sector appeared as the only option left to meet the growing needs of the nation for higher education. A few first-generation private universities started their journey alongside public universities as a

welcome complement to the country's education (and research) system at the tertiary level.

3. Quality in Tertiary-level Education

Whenever tertiary-level education is concerned, it becomes essential to establish what is understood by the term "quality," because various professionals such as educators, researchers, civil society members, and politicians perceive this concept differently. Coombs (1985) points out that quality education is assessed by student learning achievements, given traditional curriculum and standards. In addition, quality refers to the significance of what is taught and learned and how well the learning suits the present and future needs of particular learners in question, considering their specific conditions and prospects. It, moreover, relates to substantial changes in the learning system itself, considering its inputs, goals, curriculum, educational technologies; and its economic, sociocultural, and political environment.

Lamanga (2006) argues that quality in education is difficult to define and measure. However, student outcomes should be given an adequate preference. Most scholars include the nature of the educational experiences in the definition that help to produce these outcomes—the significant elements of a learning

environment. Murgatroyd and Morgan (1994) offer two different definitions of quality. One of them is relevant to quality assurance, and the rest is from consumers' perspectives which refer to the determination of standards, relevant methods, and quality requirements by an expert body, accompanied by a process of inspection or assessment that examines the extent to which practice meets these standards. Thus, consumer-driven quality refers to a concept of quality in which those who are to receive a service or product make explicit their expectations for this service or product, and as a result, quality is illustrated in terms of meeting or exceeding customers' expectations.

Moreover, Murgatroyd and Morgan, (1994) point out that the concept of quality involves a customer-driven perspective that emerges from socio-economic theories. Alam, et al., (2007) pinpoint that quality has become an essential part of education providers. As a result, customer-driven perspectives on the quality of education should include management as an integral part of overall quality in any academic institution. In recent years, quality, and particularly quality assessment and assurance procedures, have received substantial attention at the tertiary level of education across the world. Likewise, Gordon and

Partington (1993) state that quality education has been illustrated by the original source as "the amount of success which an institution is committed to providing in an educational environment enabling students significantly to achieve contemporary learning goals including appropriate academic standards. Therefore, the quality issue particularly in private universities is of special interest in the education context of Bangladesh and other LDCs (Least Developed Countries) around the globe.

4. Features of a Quality University

The development of what someone values most as a student and aspires to gain out of the post-secondary experience is often required for the growth of a quality university. For example, some students may like a large number of research opportunities, library resources, and courses in a specific area, whilst others may prefer networking, socializing, and exploring a wide range of courses. Alam et al., (2007) showed that the primary prerequisites for building a quality private university in Bangladesh are: (i) a dynamic curriculum, (ii) a research-friendly environment, and (iii) good leadership in the management of the university.

Conventionally, a quality university is expected to have a clear vision and

mission, hire and develop quality faculty members, the core of a university experience, and offer a wide range of courses (including courses that are consistently offered and updated with current research and events). Recent studies (such as by Khan and Rahman, 2022) focused on offering various opportunities for students to receive financial aid, need-based quality education, and extensive library and computing facilities. Hoque et al., (2013) emphasized providing quality academic support services, learning facilities, career services, equity services, campus residences, positive residence life programs, health and wellness supports (counseling, medical services, gym, etc.), safety and security services (no campus violence, crime, sexual assault, etc.), opportunities for networking, socializing, and student leadership, focusing on extra-curricular activities, post-education opportunities, etc.

5. Pre-requisites for Developing a Quality Private University

Scholars (Khan and Rahman, 2022) have identified various perceptions on the issue of quality education and its determining factors. However, very few empirical studies are available on this particular issue related to private higher education in Bangladesh. Andaleeb (2003) discusses seven different issues vital

to the essential fostering of tertiary-level education in Bangladesh, namely, teaching quality, appropriate method, content, peer quality, direct and indirect facilities, and political environment.

Sabur (2004) analyzes public and private education on the basis of quality assurance. Rather than providing any solution to problems considering the quality of education related to the two different educational platforms such as public and private, he shows various points of debate. Lamanga (2002) emphasizes three different aspects involved in assessing quality education at the tertiary level in the private universities of Bangladesh: the quality of teaching and scholarly research, responsiveness to the demands of the labor market, and equity. Likewise, Dhali (1999) highlights techniques related to student assessment procedures, which he divides as either formative or summative. In the case of quality assurance in higher-level education in Bangladesh, Lamanga (2006) recommends different initiatives that can ultimately ensure a quality education system for tertiary learning institutions across the country. Aminuzzaman (2007) points out that most universities do not have a long-term national vision which is crucial to quality education.

Hart and Shoolbred (1993) seek to emphasize the relationship between quality and culture. It is in order here to mention that quality management is, after all, related to how people work and that this element of action is manifested in an institution's work environment and culture. If tertiary-level education institutions are moving towards effective quality assurance, they are required to be aware of how much the culture may have to be adjusted with. In return, this may lead to discomfort for the senior management and for the entire workforce of the institution. Considering the cost of private university education, Kotler (2003) has rightly mentioned that cost is a foregoing measure or an exchange price or investment made to secure a benefit. Thus, the cost of education indicates the sacrifice made or the price paid by the families/students so that they can achieve the specific objective of learning (ibid).

Recent studies have identified results that are mostly based on theoretical considerations. Considering the circumstances, the present study aims at carrying out an empirical investigation based on a new perspective that assesses the quality of tertiary education in the private sector of the country. The findings from this study are expected to be significant in guiding our scholars and policymakers to formulate an

effective educational policy for private universities in the country that would be suitable to the spirit of contemporary times.

6. Empirical Investigation: Methods and Techniques

6. (a) Study Design: The study aims at prescribing the roadmap for a quality university in the private sector in Bangladesh. We employed a range of qualitative methods to reach the research objectives. Primary data were collected from in-depth interviews with 20 Key Informants (KIs), and four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) while secondary data were obtained from relevant literature. We prepared an interview guide and a checklist with a focus on the objectives of the study and took into consideration a few factors while preparing the interview guide, such as pre-testing of the interview guide, and a systematic review of the literature on quality education in private sectors in Bangladesh. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed for the preservation of data. The data were collected during the period from April 30 through May 20, 2023.

6. (b) Key Informants Information (KIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): The key informants were interviewed during the period between April 30 and May 20, 2023, in order to get detailed information

central to the research questions. With the consent of all interviewees, the interviews were tape-recorded. In the interviews, the FGD tools were applied to get the information in depth. The study conducted FGDs and individual interviews for mainly a few reasons. First, informants would feel more comfortable while expressing their perceptions, views, and ideas. Second, interviewees could be inspired to share their experiences and feelings on the issues pertinent to research topics. The study aimed at administering four FGDs, each consisting of 8 members.

6. (c) Sampling Procedure: The study aimed at employing a purposive sampling technique to select the private universities and study informants, pertinent to carrying out the research. Only 20 (twenty) key informants who have been working for more than 10 (ten) years in academic/administrative positions in a number of well-established (10) private universities in the country were selected as for interviewing.

6. (d) Data Source: The main source of data comprised in-depth interviews with key informants at some selected private universities in Bangladesh existed for at least the last ten years. An interview guide was prepared to carry out the interviews. The informants were interviewed face-to-face at their preferred places.

6. (e) Reflexivity and Positions: The interviewer gave details about the objectives of the research to the

informants in order to ensure the collection of desired data. This arrangement helped build trust between the interviewer and the informants, which proved crucial for data collection.

6. (f) Ethical Considerations: The interviewer tried to elicit oral consent from the informants and converse with them amiably to avoid any embarrassing or unpleasant situation. In addition, the questions were repeated and examples were added, whenever required for clarification.

6. (g) Data Collection and Management: The study primarily took into consideration the 'what aspect' of developing quality education in a private university. Later, the 'why' and 'how' aspects of quality education were examined according to the methodological framework. In fact, these three aspects, along with their dimensions of quality, are closely linked. The collected data were thematically analyzed to apprehend the main themes and patterns surfacing from the interviewees' narratives. The research demonstrates the comparison of both similarities and dissimilarities of the collected data through thematic analysis. Using a manual approach, the study sorted the collected data by the process of analyzing, structuring, organizing, and coding. Later on, the data were

segmented into subgroups and then narrowed down to specific themes.

6. (h) Thematic Analysis: The interviews were recorded carefully, and considering a few dimensions already noted, the study generated and aggregated thematic experiences about the research questions and ran the nvivo software to generate codes from the informants' statements. Afterwards, themes were created, followed by sub-themes that reflected the three dimensions in terms of content, context, and process of quality education in private universities.

7. Data Findings and Analysis

Theme 1: Private Universities vis-a-vis Quality Education in the Country:

- (a) Commitment of the GoB, UGC, BoT, and upper echelons of university management in developing quality private universities;
- (b) Active participation of students in vibrating both curricular and extracurricular activities;
- (c) Collaboration with foreign universities in establishing quality education.

7.1.(a) Commitment of the Government, UGC, BoT, and the Upper Echelons of University Management

The Government, UGC, Board of Trustees (BoT), and the upper echelons of university management

(i.e. the Vice Chancellor, the Treasure) are the officials who are at the forefront of operations of private universities. They provide the essential roadmap and future bearings for a university's overall expansion and consolidation, thereby ensuring fiscal viability and also academic reputation. It is a tightrope walk. Understandably, they experience many substantive barriers which they need to tackle brilliantly. In this regard, a few informants insisted that the UGC should check whether or not the private universities comply with the appropriate rules and regulations. They also emphasized that these universities are to be ranked (like QS, and The Times Higher Education authorities) every year based on both objective and subjective measures. All these will tend to encourage private universities to be cautious about increasing the quality of education and all other metrics.

Moreover, the UGC is expected to be more inclusive in involving private university expertise in their scope of work. Unfortunately, some UGC opportunities are currently open only to public university teachers and students. This should definitely not be the case. Moreover, the informants argued that most of the private universities lack adequate funding sources, and being completely reliant on tuition fees, fail to attract the best

quality teachers without raising tuition fees substantially. Some of them also added that private universities, in most cases, lack funds and government support for research activities and skills development. They also emphasized that government support in terms of acquiring land and the development of physical infrastructure on the campuses is the major hindrance to the development of private universities as viable academic institutions. This was echoed by many informants who argued that the campus problem could be mitigated by the allocation of government land adjacent to urban locales, having access to public transportation, and good communication facilities. The government could also take into consideration developing a private university hub with necessary modern facilities and infrastructure to accommodate several private universities in one place. Many informants pointed out that private universities lack an effective association to effectively deal with the officials of the Government and UGC. The Association of Private Universities of Bangladesh (APUB) is a loosely knit organization, which cannot work unitedly to deal with the regulatory bodies, especially UGC. Since private universities run without any government support of funds, they have to take necessary steps to

survive in the face of serious competition through effective utilization of the fees they receive from their enrolled students. Several informants stated that the commitment of private universities to students is unavoidably greater than that of their counterparts, public universities and therefore the government should support private universities in terms of curriculum development and training for the staff, providing equal opportunities for graduates and faculty members in scholarships and higher education abroad. They also stressed that the government has an important regulatory role to play in overseeing the overall functioning of a private university, starting from giving permission to establish itself to offering need-based programs.

Recent studies suggest that the provision of organizational mechanisms for sharing resources amongst the universities (such as combined library facilities of private universities; combined e-library facilities, etc.) may greatly mitigate costs. A few informants focused on the following vital issues:

(i) Requirement of UGC permission to commence a new course curriculum and amend the existing ones is a time-consuming process. UGC needs to be prompter and more efficient in its total operation to this end. It may be

divided into two parts - one for the public and the other for the private universities of the country;

(ii) Lack of commitment, accountability, and transparency amongst the members of Board of Trustees (BoT) of a range of private universities often cause severe factional fighting among themselves and frequent interference in academic and administrative affairs. Some of them often weaken the position of the Vice-chancellor and disrupt the regular day-to-day activities of the university;

(iii) Absence of research and publication facilities and also M.Phil or Ph.D. programs inhibits private universities from realizing their true potential as they cannot utilize the services of truly qualified academics, scholars, and researchers in those endeavors.

In spite of all these, private universities could introduce an inclusive survey of the job settlement opportunities of their graduates. This could facilitate them to achieve a clearer perception of the competitiveness of their graduates in the contemporary job market. They could also receive comments from their alumni on the skill gaps which they aim to address in their alma mater. Likewise, this could also be accomplished by an independent body or the UGC or by the faculty members on behalf of all the

universities. The outcomes of the study could then be cross-checked and compared. In turn, this would provide a clearer platform or market signal to both universities and students concerned regarding employer preferences.

Moreover, private universities should actively collaborate and have sustainable partnerships with universities abroad. Evidence reveals that a few leading private universities have already started to engage in academic and research collaborations, in areas like curriculum development, student and teacher exchanges, and credit transfers. These relationships have facilitated the transfer and dissemination of knowledge which have made reciprocal improvements in academia. University and Industry (U&I) linkages and win-win situations could also be developed for these universities and industries by allowing them to collaborate in research and development (R and D).

In incubator set-ups, private universities could establish a liaison with industries on such activities as commercializing their ideas, concepts, and technological products. They could also hire and accommodate ex-pat professors to teach important lessons for a certain period of time of a particular year (let's say for one semester) as visiting

fellows or professors. This could help raise the current standards within private universities and also help them update syllabi and necessary modules. At present, a few leading private universities have started to follow this strategy (to varying degrees of success) and have jointly organized national/international seminars and conferences by pooling their resources, thereby facilitating knowledge transfer and greater recognition for the universities.

The BoT is expected to be composed of veteran scholars and professionals from a wide range of disciplines, who should carefully decide the mission and vision of the university and be involved in employing the appropriate people who can lead the university on the right path. Most of the informants underscored that the BoT and also the upper echelons of the university management should focus on the employability of the graduates, should give an impression to the staff that they are part of the university, ensure job satisfaction at all levels, duly provide all logistic support, listen to the staff (both academic and admin) periodically for good ideas to develop the university, integrate up-to-date technology and other issues pertinent to the development of the university, introduce courses/modules which can help enhance employability chances of the graduates, and

delegate authority to the lower-level administrators.

7.1.(b) Active Participation of Students in Vibrating both Curricular and Extra-curricular Activities

Studies show that extra-curricular activities provide a passage for students to strengthen the lessons to be learned in the classroom, and offer them the opportunity to apply the various learning skills in a real-world context. Some informants highlighted the necessity of promoting various clubs, such as business and entrepreneurship club, debating club, language club, environment club, science club, sports club, and the like in fostering an educational environment that is conducive to creating future leaders of the country. Additionally, the extra-curricular activities help create an environment for active participation in co-curricular activities, create leaders for the future, and provide tunes for developing leadership, collaboration, teamwork, confidence, and a sense of ownership. In considering these issues, one informant added that “a sizable number of private universities over the country are now shedding light on extra-curricular activities, and clubs have been arranging various programs for enhancing the necessary skills required for competitive job markets and improving their humanity”.

7.1.(c) Collaboration with Foreign Universities in Ensuring Quality Education

Research reveals that tertiary-level education in Bangladesh is often failing to meet the growing demand for quality education and a skilled workforce in the economy. The government policy of widening the scope of higher education has expanded the number of both private and public universities, giving less focus on ensuring quality education. Given this situation, one informant stressed that “quality education and scientific research cannot be done in isolation, rather it is always facilitated by collaboration between diverse institutions and researchers.” The key to collaborating with foreign universities regarding education and research is to share knowledge, available research infrastructures, and ideas in a spirit of equal partnership. This will allow both institutions to be expanded on more development works together in the future.

One informant rightly pointed out that “collaborations are not restricted to what can be conventionally thought of as academic exchanges of students, faculty members, and ideas but can also be understood as an act of collaboration that produces something, neither institution could gain on its own. Thus, it is crucial to develop partnerships together and

build a network of collaboration that is complementary to all parties; considering the pivotal contributions of universities as centers of excellence where people come to be educated aiming to driving towards future prosperity and to ensure all spheres of global cooperation in our complex, globalized economy.

Theme 2: Private Universities, Quality Education and Its Impacts

- (a) Quality education and betterment of the society as a whole;
- (b) Quality education and economic growth;
- (c) Challenges to establishing quality private universities.

7.2 (a) Quality Education and Betterment of the Society as a Whole

Recent evidence shows that private universities have been playing a crucial role in easing up the acute demand and supply imbalance of human resources in the business sector (Ahmed et al., 2018). These institutions have also been working to reduce the drainage of undergraduate students to foreign countries, thus contributing to saving a huge amount of valuable foreign exchange. Additionally, they have also provided ample employment prospects to an increasing pool of the reputed Bangladeshi graduates, thereby attenuating the adverse

impacts of brain drain. In this context, one informant stated that “private universities are not only large in number; they also vary in quality”. He also added that “there are no less than ten private universities in the country that are at least at par with the public universities regarding quality”. There is no denying the fact that some of the private universities have been able to employ world-class teacher-researchers who are part of a strong international network of scholars and are carrying out their research in Bangladesh in collaboration with their foreign counterparts.”

As a matter of fact, white-collar employment has been rising in Bangladesh in conformity with the appearance of a healthy and lively private sector in tertiary-level education. The market-driven approach in private universities with its special focus on Computer Science, Business Studies, IT, Development Studies, and Pharmacy, among other fields, has been providing a steady supply of skilled human resources for banks, local corporate firms, multinational corporations, and so on. Additionally, many graduates from private universities are going to foreign countries on scholarships for pursuing higher studies. One informant argued that as a stakeholder, at least the top private universities in Bangladesh are always

in touch with the ‘market’. Therefore, they work towards preparing their graduates well so that they get jobs in reputed organizations. Also, the private university culture is such that students have to learn to communicate effectively; emphasis being given on the use of technological literacy. This results in producing good human resources.

Regarding collaboration with foreign universities, several informants shared that academic partnerships with international universities in the form of transferring credit arrangements are increasing. As a result, the emphasis on recruiting qualified academics, amplifying both the quality and quantity of research, addressing new teaching strategies, and brilliant supervision in many of private universities is a significant development, which is considered an important step forward with the needs of the nation in the 21st century.

7.2. (b) Quality Education and Economic Growth

Scholars (Hossain et al. 2012) argue that quality education can play a vital role in the economic development of the country. One of the informants pointed out that budgetary expenditure on education in private universities is expected to contribute to economic development and save around five billion dollars every year that we have to spend for employing

expatriates in our industries. The essential requirement is to replace those experts by way of developing expertise among our graduates. Thus, one informant emphasized that “our private universities should find out the skill sets required by the industries in Bangladesh and then instill those skills among the graduates during their studies. The industry will absorb them happily and dependence on expatriates will be reduced, thereby saving lots of foreign currencies”. In this way, private universities can contribute to the overall development of the country.

7.2 (c) Challenges to Establish Quality Private Universities

The number of private universities in the country has rapidly increased in recent years but the students’ experiences regarding learning, job prospects, and quality of education are uneven. One informant added that “some of the private universities have pulled ahead of the rest and have been providing education which is comparable to that of the best public universities in Bangladesh”. He further added that some private universities have even achieved national and global recognition while a second category consists of universities that have been trying to develop the quality of education, producing some scholarly research and making the governance structure

more accountable and transparent. Notably, a significant portion of the informants mentioned about a third category of private universities is reported to be engaged in various unethical activities such as selling certificates, misappropriating university funds, and so on.

Given this scenario, however, it would be unwise to bracket all the private universities together. As a matter of fact, there is a vast disparity in terms of the quality of education offered by the various private universities, which may not be redressed in the short or medium run. In many cases, “there have been questions about the quality of students and teachers, scholarly research, lab facilities, internet connectivity, permanent campus, residential facilities, up-to-date libraries, and comparatively higher tuition fees, etc.”

Some informants, while expressing their dissatisfaction about the mismanagement of public universities due to political interferences in the main, laid emphasis upon proper handling of private university affairs by the authorities through certain measures, such as, (i) only the genuine promoters are to be permitted to establish and operate private universities and (ii) the hurdles to find proper candidates for top positions

like those of Vice-chancellors and Treasurers may be overcome through the formation and use of a competent 'Search Committee'.

8. Conclusion

The very birth of private universities following the enactment of the Private Universities Act, 1992 proved a timely and welcome step that addressed some urgent national issues like (i) a remedy for the frustrating situation of academic session jams at the tertiary level, (ii) a big saving of foreign currency being spent by the graduate/post-graduate students for higher studies abroad, especially India, and (iii) the provision of an alternative option, with a better prospect, for higher education within the country. An honest and very true expression may be that the step to open the door for private universities to come up proved a timely national necessity.

With the passage of time, some private universities proved to be effective centers for higher education, without any misuse of taxpayers' money, which provides the prime source of funds for the country's public universities. However, the dependence of private universities upon students' tuition fees in the main, holds them in a tight situation of (i) ensuring quality, on the one hand, and (ii) meeting all

required expenses effectively, on the other.

Undoubtedly, a significant number of private universities have, by this time, proved worthwhile in overcoming the challenges and producing graduates who have proved successful at home and abroad. In performing their prime responsibilities of value addition to the efforts of their students, they are much ahead of many of their public sector counterparts, with much better quality inputs.

Except a very few of the private universities that are being run improperly with a selfish motive, all others are trying to survive and grow through the proper use of their scarce resources meticulously and turning out the much-needed human resources for the country. With the provision of logical care and support, these private universities are expected to be real centers of excellence and meet the needs of human resources of the country. As a matter of fact, "the question should not be whether the private universities are to survive, the question is how to help them grow as effective and useful institutions." To this end, the disservices given by the dishonest promoters (as BoT members) are to be stopped by the regulators, i.e. the concerned government agencies.

Success stories of private universities are almost universal. For instance, in the USA, they have been successfully offering high-quality education at a reasonable cost. As far back as in 1636, the private sector was allowed by the U.S government to enter the tertiary-level education sector, which was previously dominated by public universities alone. Considering the quality of education ensured, many informants argued that most of the high-quality universities in the US operate privately – meaning that the private sector is a much better manager there than the public sector counterparts in successfully running the universities. A few informants emphasized that those private universities have also been enormously allocating necessary funding for carrying out cutting-edge research activities.

In Bangladesh too, the BoT and other higher echelons comprising the Vice Chancellor, and the Treasurer, in a significant number of private universities, are committed to providing quality education. One of the informants went on to say that those universities have provided “quality curriculum”, “teaching competence”, “service facility”, and “service delivery” which are positively related to quality assurance at the tertiary level. Another informant with a long experience in university

teaching added that among the government agencies concerned the University Grants Commission (U.G.C.) is the closest one to universities. According to that informant, the very word “grants” is very significant, indicating that the U.G.C. came into being to ensure funding for universities and since there was no private university in the country at the time the U.G.C. had been created, it was dedicated only to disbursing government funds among public universities. It may, therefore, be argued that the U.G.C. has also to do much for private universities in providing public funds for their infrastructural development, scholarly research, and faculty development efforts. So, in order to ensure proper development of private universities in the country, a separate wing of the UGC, with proper capabilities and responsibilities is deemed essential.

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