

Chapter 18

Public and Private Higher Education Concerns and Challenges: A Case of Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Like in most developing countries, higher education in Bangladesh has experienced dramatic changes in recent years. This chapter examines four aspects—access, quality, equity, and governance—centring education in both public and private universities of the country. It also highlights obstacles and challenges the universities are facing and puts forward some recommendations in these respects. Two methods, (a) semi-structured informal interview and (b) document and publication study, were used in collecting data. Primary data were collected through semi-structured informal interviews. A total of 30 participants were interviewed. The study opines that higher educational institutions should not only have good governance but also be more devoted to instituting quality control. It also observes that sustaining the quality of education acceptable both nationally and internationally requires setting up an autonomous quality assurance body. It stresses that the active and sincere involvement of state and academia can help address issues related to four aspects—access, governance, equality, and quality—of higher education.

INTRODUCTION

The development of modern society depends to a large extent on the nature and standard of higher education. In the era of globalisation, the growing value of knowledge can hardly be understated.

Higher education grooms skilled people for assuming various tasks. Access to higher education assists individuals and societies to attain abilities in order to improve conditions that have an effect on quality of life and to augment productivity. Higher education has enormous possibilities in

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pressing forward prosperity in the developing countries (UGC, 2006). It makes space for numerous economic and social benefits in the private and public spheres (Table 1). Higher education has experienced radical transformations in most of the developing countries. After nearly three decades of brisk expansion, these transformations have been found to have led to steadily increasing problems, in terms of missions, resources and outcomes, by an environment full of constraints and challenges (Marginson, 2007; Salmi, 1992).

There is an increasing rate of disparity in higher education in the developing countries. While participation in higher education has increased in the developing countries, access is not equitable (Oketch, 2003). Access to higher education is often regulated by socio-economic status. Females take part to a lesser degree in higher education than their male counterparts (Chauhan, 2008). Several studies also observed that students who take part in higher education are those who have power over social, economic and cultural capital (Patrinos, 1990). Garrett (2003) noted that globalisation and privatisation have great impacts on the goals of higher education. It further added that universities are linked with markets, industries and corporate businesses while issues of equality and access rarely make it to official and public discourses on education (Garrett, 2003).

Like in most developing countries, higher education in Bangladesh has experienced dramatic changes in recent years. There are two major types of universities in Bangladesh. One is public and the other is private university. A public university is owned and operated by the government. Private universities on the other hand are owned by the private sector. While public universities depend on funds made available by the government, private universities rely almost entirely upon tuition to cover costs.

The private universities of the country were established because government alone cannot support the demand for higher education in the country, and private finance came out as a noteworthy opportunity to make existing higher education resources. The overall participation in higher education in the private universities has increased remarkably in recent years. The increase in the number of higher educational institutions has facilitated access to higher education for the huge number of students passing out of college (passing the Higher Secondary Certificate examination). The rapid expansion has had a huge impact on the scenario of higher education in Bangladesh.

The major challenges to the higher education in Bangladesh lie at the knotty issues related to quality, accessibility, equity, governance, and accountability (Ahmed, 2013 b.; Andaleeb, 2003; Andaleeb, 2008; Andaleeb, 2013; Ehsan, 2008;

Table 1. Benefits from higher education

Benefits	Private (Individual and Family Benefits)	Public (Social Benefits)
Economic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Higher salaries 2. Employment 3. Higher savings 4. Improved working conditions 5. 10. Personal and professional mobility 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Greater productivity 2. National and regional development 3. Financial support 4. Increased consumption 5. Increased potential for transformation from low skill industrial economy to that of a knowledge based one
Social	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improved quality of life for self and children 2. Better decision making 3. Improved personal status 4. Increased educational opportunities 5. Healthier lifestyle and higher life expectancy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nation building and development of leadership 2. Democratic participation 3. Social Mobility 4. Improved health 5. Improved basic and secondary education

Source: World Bank, 2002, p. 81

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