

Essay on Higher Education in Bangladesh

Hints: Introduction, UGC, State of Higher Education in Bangladesh, Scarcity of Institutions, Lack of Modernization, Cost, Session Jam and Politicization, Fund Crisis, Tuition Fees, Grading Policy, Admission Test, Quality of Education, Research, Conclusion.

Introduction

The Government of Bangladesh operates many institutions in the primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels. In the past, tertiary education was primarily English-controlled, Now reforms have been processed to leave such practices in the past and are looking forward to education as a way to provide a somewhat poverty-stricken nation with a brighter future. Higher Education in Bangladesh refers to education pursued after the higher secondary level. After completing higher secondary education in Bangladesh, one can pursue graduate-level education in general or other professional courses. One needs to spend 4 years to earn an honors bachelor's degree from a university. The universities can be either in the public sector or in the private sector. Moreover, there are quite a good number of Madrasah, technical institutes, and general colleges that provide bachelor's degrees. However, the enrolment in the higher education institutes in Bangladesh is conspicuously low as compare to other developing countries of the world. Reforms in the higher education system of Bangladesh are, therefore, the need of the hour.

UGC (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh)

The UGC was established in 1973. It oversees 29 public universities; around 1800 colleges under the National University; the Bangladesh Open University; and 51 private universities. UGC is also responsible for distributing government funds to universities in the public

sector. The final responsibility of the UGC is to create an environment where universities in Bangladesh will be a center for both quality education and a seat of knowledge creation and extension.

State of Higher Education in Bangladesh

The problem with university education in Bangladesh probably lies in the classic dilemma of quantity and quality control. Despite all our efforts, only 8 percent of the university-going population (18-25 years) is currently enrolled in a university in Bangladesh. The public universities accommodate approximately 1,50,000 students; the National University another 800,000; and the Open University another 250,000. All the private universities accommodate around 1,30,000 students.

Scarcity of Institutions

Each year more students are completing their HSC examinations. Their appetite for higher education has also been whetted since reasonable and respectable jobs are not available without a basic graduation degree. Unfortunately, the malaise of resource inadequacy continues to deprive higher education of needed funds to build capacity in the education system, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to close the gap. In addition to physical capacity, there is also a tremendous need to add human capacity (mainly qualified teachers) to the higher education system very rapidly.

Tertiary gross enrolment ratio, Male, 2002, % (UNESCO)

8 Tertiary gross enrolment ratio, Female, 2002, % (UNESCO)

4 Tertiary gross enrolment ratio, Total, 2002, % (UNESCO)

6 Tertiary gross enrolment ratio = Enrolment of tertiary students of all ages expressed as a percentage of the tertiary school-age

population.

Lack of Modernization

New knowledge and its benefits are often unavailable to those who have already gone through the higher education system. Many of these people hold responsible positions. Today, many of them are stuck with outdated knowledge because once they are out of the education system they have little opportunity to get back in to enhance their knowledge and understanding of new developments, theories, and methods that might serve them better.

Cost

The cost of higher education, according to some, is driven by a frenzy to make money. There is a contention that some educational institutions “sell” certificates without requiring students to attend classes. Private universities also charge fees that seem to border on extortion. Such fees make education accessible only to the moneyed people. The pricing pressure imposed by academia is creating adverse ripple effects in the economy that must be addressed and rationalized because these prices are not based on free-market forces, but on restricted market structures that represent localized monopoly conditions.

Session Jam and Politicization

The inevitable problem with public universities soon surfaced session jam and politicization of the university administration. Professor Islam made one thing very clear that all citizens have the right to express their political views, whether they are students or teachers. Nevertheless, having said so, an institutional arrangement has to be reached where such political expression doesn't hamper the academic

activities of universities anywhere in Bangladesh. Things can't and won't change overnight, but Professor Islam assured us that the UGC and the government are concerned about the issue just as much as are most teachers, students, and guardians.

Fund Crisis

Despite funds from the Government, public universities lack adequate funding and adequate infrastructure (physical and non-physical). The remuneration of teachers is lowly compared to their alternative in the private sector. Not receiving “efficiency wage”, teachers in the public sector are sometimes forced to look for part-time employment in the private sector. Public universities have limited access and limited scope to raise finance outside funds generated from the Government.

Tuition Fees

Tuition fees in the public sector are not rationalized by markets. Any policy, however, has to be somewhere in between a market and a social solution. The debate pointed to donations from generous citizens and alumni. This is a practice observed in even the richest universities in the world, Oxford, and Cambridge just to name a few. Private universities face a different set of problems. Since private universities have to raise funds from their own sources, they tend to emphasize subjects that have more of a market value than only a social value. They also tend to locate predominantly in Dhaka and/or where more affluent families live. Tuition fees can burden the budgets of the parents. High tuition fees can also totally discourage genuine meritorious students from the thought of applying for admission to a good private university.

Grading Policy

The grading policy differs between public and private universities and across public and private universities. It even varies within the same university and sometimes within the same department of a university. This sends mixed signals to the job market. UGC is trying to move towards a common grading policy for all universities in Bangladesh.

Admission Test

A common grading policy precipitates a common admission test. Public university students raised this issue. If medical colleges in Bangladesh can have a common admission test, why are not all public universities too? This would save time, money, and hassle for students and their families. Surely this is 'food for thought'.

Quality of Education

Although the UGC is an overseer of the quality of university education in Bangladesh, it's ultimately the universities themselves who have to address the issue. The UGC is exploring ways on how private universities can also receive funds from the Government. It's also high time we all thought about providing e-library facilities in all universities with access to the Internet. A university is not only a seat of teaching but also a center for knowledge creation and knowledge extension. This is where both public and private universities have to come forward together. Many good academics in public and private universities are publishing in international journals and doing wonderful researches without patronage from their own universities. There are also wonderful teachers in public and private universities who are teaching for the love of the profession without caring much for any personal benefit.

Research

Universities in Bangladesh have the potential to specialize and expand graduate teaching through research. With guidance and assistance from the state or generous citizens and other philanthropic institutions, universities in Bangladesh can expand their MPhil and Ph.D. programs. With some initiatives, it is very much possible for universities to develop link programs with universities outside Bangladesh. This can address the brain drain problem and also save resources that would have been spent elsewhere.

Conclusion

The higher education system, today, is not only a window of opportunity at the individual level, but also has strategic implications for national growth. The UGC's 20-year strategic plan for higher education in Bangladesh says that at least 28 new universities will have to be established to raise the capacity to the optimum level. Hopefully, this will serve to invigorate strategy development and ease the issues highlighted with resolve. The higher education institutions (HEIs) in Bangladesh will continue to face numerous challenges in the coming days, which include the issues of quality, access, cost, capacity, consistency, and so on. To meet these challenges, there is a critical need to develop coherent, comprehensive, and socially responsive strategies to make higher education more relevant, rigorous, and proactive indeed.