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The State of Private Universities in Bangladesh: An Evaluation of Students Perception

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Abstract: The universal characteristics of private universities are explored using a sample of 210 students from private universities to identify their perception. Both theoretical and empirical measurement issues have been considered using structural equations as the primary data analysis approach by using a structured questionnaire. The specific objectives of the research are to, inter alia, measure of the satisfaction level of students in case of academic issues, support services and general issues, which will lead to identify their attitude towards private universities in Bangladesh. Moreover, the study would also try to identify the effective extra curricular activity, and the most satisfied physical environment according to them. From the survey, it is observed that the students are satisfied with the services provided by the private universities. Though some of them are not satisfied with the services but they do not have any other options because every year huge number of students passed from the higher secondary class and the public universities do not have the capacity to cater the needs of most of the students want to have a university graduation. Therefore, they know the position of the private universities but they do not want to come out with the fact, as they have no other choices. However, private universities should try to improve their current standing through maintaining and retaining credibility and viability, maintaining the highest student quality, designing a broad based liberal arts curriculum and emphasizing on research and scholarly activities. Overall they should have strategic plan to ensure the quality of education.

Key Words: *Policy Private University, Students' Perception, Educational Credibility, Quality.*

1. Introduction

The education system of a country functions as an agent of social change and as a force directed towards implementing the ideals of its society. In this process it teaches the value of democracy and how to make the society more democratic. Schools, colleges, and universities are organized to deliver education to different groups of learners at different levels, universities are meant for organizing and delivering higher education. The traditional function of higher education is to train up future leaders of society and to develop high-level manpower for professional, technical, and administrative functions. Now the function of higher education is defined in a new way it is aimed to produce new knowledge, and serve as agents for transfer, adaptation, and dissemination of knowledge generated in other similar institutions of the world.

Higher education is imparted in universities, degree, and post- graduate colleges in Bangladesh. Traditionally public sector universities manage the arena of higher

education. In 1992, the Private University Act was passed with an aim of supplementing the public universities in promoting higher education and reducing the pressure on public universities. Until the enactment of the Act, all universities in Bangladesh were in the public sector only. The act was amended in 1998. To fulfill the ever-growing demand of institutions for higher studies, at present there are 79 universities in Bangladesh. Only 26 of those are in the public sector and 53 of those are in the private sector. (Gulshan and Muzaffar, 2005). The main objectives of private universities are to meet the growing demand for higher education in order to create skilled manpower for the economic development of the country. Although most of these universities lack the necessary infrastructure, they function well. Moreover, demand for educational opportunities seems to have dramatically increased. As a result, the number of students in the private universities is on the rising trend, and increased to 8,718 to 46080 from 1998 to 2003 (UGC report, 2005) with a growth rate of 33.83%. Moreover, the enrolment in the private universities constitutes 43% of the total university enrolment in 2003 (excluding the enrollment in National & Open University). However, some intellects of Bangladesh raised a number of disparagement regarding the newborn private universities (Haque, 2004), (Ahmed, 2003), (Rahman, 2003), (Sumon, 2004), (Cookson F., 2004), (Siddiqi, 2006), (Khan, 2004). It is evident that the new private universities are playing increasingly important role in imparting higher education in Bangladesh. So, it is essential to identify the view of the direct service receiver i.e. the students of the private university.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the situation of private university in Bangladesh and examine the student's perspective to identify the satisfaction level regarding private university. Students' perception regarding the different aspects of private universities operating in Dhaka city will lead to identify their attitude towards private universities in Bangladesh. The assumption to be ascertained is whether the students are satisfied or not satisfied with the present facilities provided by the private universities. In this study, the focus is on Dhaka city as among 53 private universities 46 are located in Dhaka city (Haque, 2004).

1.1. Background

Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s the public sector in the UK underwent a series of massive transformations (Davies and Thomas, 2000; Jackson, 2001; Liu and Dubinsky, 2000; Mavin and Bryans, 2000; Worrall *et al*., 2000). Bakewell and Gibson-Sweet (1998) observe moves towards radical transformations of the UK's higher education system. The transformation of higher education system both in quantitative and qualitative terms has been influenced by the wave of globalization (Siddiqi, 2002). In Bangladesh, a new chapter was added to the history of higher education in 1992. The 'conventional' teaching and degree awarding universities have been allowed to operate in the private sector (Siddiqui, 2002). Elton (1995, p. 43) remarked, "In the rapidly changing environment, universities inevitably are changing" and Richardson *et al*. (1995, p. 15) stress that higher education organization systems are in need of "environmentally-fitting organizational change". Both the internal and external environments have precipitated organizational changes and much empirical research has been conducted in order to explain their causes and effects (Hall, 1997; Shaw and Barrett-Power, 1997). Students' satisfaction is one of the main issues in this regard.

1.2 Objectives of the Research

The broad objective of the research is to –"Measure the perceptions of the students of private universities of Dhaka city in terms of different facilities provided by the

respective universities". After assigning the broad objective, the focus is on specific objective. This is because specific objectives will make the research part precise and clear. The specific objectives of the research are to, *inter alia*, measure of the satisfaction level of students in case of academic issues, support services and general issues, which will lead to identify their attitude towards private universities in Bangladesh.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Background

2.1 Key Objectives of Private University

The private university is a proven alternative and provides a new avenue for higher education all over the world (Ittefaq, n.b.). A well-funded and professionally managed private university can provide flexible options of forging global linkages, both for students and institutions, and impart the highest quality education at home. It can:

1. Share with the public sector responsibility for providing education with a program diversity that suits market needs;
2. Share the sector cost by generating new resources through non-profit private funding;
3. Save foreign exchange, if not earn it, by admitting international students;
4. Be more flexible in designing curricula and syllabi to suit the job market in the country and abroad;
5. Being dependent on product value (i.e. graduates), it is more likely to experiment with teaching methods and application of technology;
6. Provide a channel for the return of expatriate scholars for short or long term association (a reversal of the 'brain drain');
7. Culturally equip adolescents forced to live abroad and thereby reduce resultant emotional strain on families; and
8. Catalyze reforms in public universities.

2.2 Key Issues of Private Universities in Bangladesh

The need for private universities is now beyond question. Ever since 1992 the private universities have been playing an important role in developing various academic disciplines. At present more than 46 thousand students are studying in 53 or so private universities and whereas the rate of increase in the number of students in public universities is around 5% and the growth rate of private universities is 33.83% (UGC report, 2003).
Almost fifteen years of private sector higher education practices in Bangladesh have tremendous impact on public universities, in particular, and on the society, in general. Still this high growth knowledge sector faces some basic problems, which are outlined below:

- **Teaching Staff**

Except a few, most of the private universities are run by adjunct or hired faculty members. Public university teachers are working as resource persons for the private universities. So the scarcity of resource persons is a common phenomenon. As a result one teacher is engaged with 4/5 universities for teaching. Faculties who joined the private universities do not subscribe to the idea of novelty of teaching profession as it was used to be considered before. Complains are there that faculties consider teaching as an easy money earning pursuit like any other vocation having little or no regard to traditional ethics and morality associated with teaching. Most of the private universities

are located in Dhaka city as most of these universities run with the hired teachers drawn from Dhaka University, Jahangir Nagar University, BUET, etc. (Haque, 2004). Private universities are yet to develop a pool of dedicated and research oriented core faculties (Ittefaq, n.b.).

- **Curriculum**

An appropriate curriculum is another crucial issue of quality education (Haque, 2004). The curricula of private universities are much better and modern than the public universities. Most of the private universities follow North American curriculum and also many of the universities have academic linkages with the North American Universities. Private university curricula are a bit narrow, which is dedicated to produce specialized products. Most of the private universities are offering market driven degrees i.e. business administration, computer science etc. The public university curricula originated in East India Company's philosophy of limited or restricted learning and preparing a few people for petty 'clerical jobs'. The public universities practices, traditions and philosophy have changed very little over the period of nearly two hundreds years (Ittefaq, n.b.).

- **Infrastructure**

It has been perceived that even years after their inception, a number of private universities still have not shifted to or even acquired their own lands for their campuses. They are operating in the heart of cities in the midst of deafening noises and crowded and polluting traffic. Most private universities are still faced with shortage of classrooms, adequate spaces for larger classes, rich libraries, modern laboratories, adequate facilities for regular and visiting faculty and administrators, spaces for indoor and outdoor games and sports, students' common rooms, auditoriums etc. (Sumon, 2004), (Siddiqi, 2006), (Ahmed, 2003), (Haque, 2004), (Shahjahan, 2002), (Siddiqi, 2002).

- **Quality**

A content analysis carried out on the mission statements of the private universities reveals that the goal of these universities are to attain and delivery quality education, which in reality is a far cry (Huda, 2005). The quality of a higher educational institution is determined not merely by the quality of lessons that are imparted but also by factors related to academic policy, research activities, continues up improvement of curriculum, public services offered by the university and by the individual faculties, level of academic freedom enjoyed by the faculties, contribution to the national economy and to the society etc. Ahmed et.al. (2002) suggested two levels of quality assurance for the universities of Bangladesh. The first level is quality requirements, which is related with human agents and physical infrastructures i.e. quality of policy making, management, academic staff, support staff, students and the physical infrastructures. The second level is quality levels of quality requirements flow from the first set, which are mainly the programs, delivery systems, support services and evaluation schemes. According to Haque (2004), after extensive investigation the performance of the nine universities found satisfactory of among all the 52 universities.

The role of the government is very crucial. The governmental agency, which is responsible for overseeing both the public and private universities is called University Grants Commission, should create a framework for monitoring quality issues in higher education. Interestingly, in Bangladesh there still is no accreditation council for universities (Ittefaq, n.b.).

- **Administration**

Universities and other organizations with a large number of professional employees are fundamentally different in organizational structure from business or governmental bureaucracies (Demerath et al., 1987; Etzioni 1959; Litwak, 1961; Parsons, 1956). In an article, which questioned some basic tenets of classical organization theory, Etzioni (1959) noted that professional organizations, including universities, are characterized by a dual authority structure – an administrative structure organized bureaucratically and a professional authority structure distinguished by collegiality and professional autonomy. Conflict between professionals and bureaucrats has also been observed in the private universities of Bangladesh. Interestingly newer types of conflict are being reported regarding the private universities of Bangladesh i.e conflict among the owners or promoters, university administration and the professionals working for the institution. In many cases in the absence of qualified university administration, the promoters of the private initiatives interfere with the regular academic and administrative issues. The commonly reported conflicts are - the control over the institution, appointments of staff, student admission, procurement of logistics etc. In many cases, the decisions of the academic departments are being overruled by the administration. The promoters play active role even in the routine issues of institutions. The management of the universities acts basically as the representative of the promoters instead of pursuing their independent professional goals and standards.

2.3 Hypotheses Formulation

Test of One Sample Mean Test: Hypothesis 1

To know the satisfaction level of the students regarding private university of Dhaka city, the following hypothesis is formulated:

***H_0^1**: The students of the private universities are not satisfied, against,*
***H_1^1:** The students of the private universities are satisfied.*

At $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance, the above hypothesis was tested.

Decision Rule:
H_0^1 will be accepted, if *P Value* is less than Significance Level i.e. 0.05; otherwise H_0^1 rejected at 5% level of significance (Lind et. al., 2002, pp-347).

Variable(s):
Dependent: Student's Satisfaction
Independent: Examination and other course works, Class time, Time provided by teaching staff, Course curriculum, Library condition, Computer labs facilities, Class rooms, The tuition fees, Extra curricular activities, Location of campus, Social acceptability.

3. Methodology

Exploratory research was conducted to identify different dimensions of students' observations in case of private university. Hypothesis was formulated on the basis of core variables and conclusive research was applied to prove the hypothesis. Non-probability sampling technique is being used for determining the sample size. The research was conducted over 210 sample units (students of 6 different private universities of Dhaka city) using the convenience sampling technique. The data were

collected through cross sectional survey method through a structured questionnaire. Quantitative and qualitative information related to private universities was developed through the analytical scanning effort.

Measurement
A Psychometric questionnaire was used for data collection and non-parametric statistics used for the data analysis. In case of this study descriptive statistics is used to describe the data and then inferential statistics is used to infer the analysis.

Two measurement approaches were used. The *One Sample t Test* is done to identify the satisfaction level of the students' of private universities. As can be seen here, the One Sample t Test was insignificant in all of the cases. Second, the *Factor Analysis* considered identifying the importance level of satisfaction of different variables.

Hypothesis Tests
Hypotheses were tested focusing on the perception of the students of private university as the primary criterion.

Hypothesis 1: Results
The result of the hypothesis showed that in all the cases, the P Values are grater than the Significance Level i.e. 0.05. As a result, we fail to accept H_0 thus H_1 is accepted, which means that the students of the private universities are satisfied in the case of academic issues, support services and general issues *(See table 1)*.

4. Results and Discussion:

Students Satisfaction about Efficiency of Private University

Well-educated population is considered as a powerful resource of a country. Private universities along with their public sector counterparts are playing an important role in generating the resource base for the country by creating skilled human resources. Private higher education, which is a relatively new idea in Bangladesh, attracts both appreciations and criticisms from different quarters (Ahmed, 2003), (Siddiqi, 2006), (Cookson, 2004). The growing demand for higher education is the reason for the introduction of private universities in Bangladesh. However, it is essential to know the factors that contribute to increase the quality of education in the private universities. To analyze the factors we tried to evaluate the teaching and related facilities in the students' institutions, the quality of the management operation of those institutions and the social acceptance of their respective institutions in Bangladesh.

The present research find out students' perception regarding the different aspects of private universities operating in Dhaka city i.e. teaching and related services, and general issues. The management capacity and the efficiency of the private universities in the students' perception are reflected in three different aspects- academic issues, support services and general impressions. In all the case the students are satisfied with the services provided by the universities *(See Table 1)*.

Table 1: Summarized Results of the Hypothesis1 regarding efficiency of private universities of Bangladesh

Dependent Variables	Factors	Independent Variables	P Value	Implications
Student's Satisfaction		Examination and other course works	2.10	Satisfied
	Academic Issues	Class time and regularity	1.76	Satisfied
		Time provided by teaching staff	2.10	Satisfied
		Course curriculum	1.78	Satisfied
		Library condition	1.90	Satisfied
	Support Services	Computer labs facilities	1.76	Satisfied
		Class rooms	1.82	Satisfied
		The tuition fees	1.90	Satisfied
		Extra curricular activities	1.52	Satisfied
		Location of campus	1.90	Satisfied
	General Issues	Social acceptability	1.78	Satisfied

Source: Field Survey

The result of the study proved that there are no differences between the expectations of the students and management of private universities regarding these three aspects. This implies that private universities are able to satisfy the students in terms of the quality of their management. But these does not match with the perceptions of the intellectuals of the country (Siddiqi, 2006), (Haque, 2004), (Ahmed, 2003), (Rahman, 2003), (Sumon, 2004), (Cookson F., 2004). However, the study shows that the students do not face any problem in case of the social acceptability of the private university. In the study it was also aimed to find out level of satisfaction of the students of private universities. In case of extra curricular facilities, it was found that the students are satisfied with the debating club, computer club, and cultural club, which are respectively 71.3%, 61.3% and 63.5%. Mostly, the students are highly satisfied with the business club activities, which is 81.5% *(See Table 2).*

Table 2: Factor Analysis of Extra Curricular Facilities output, the Extraction Method: Principle Component Analysis

Variables	Initial	Extraction
Sports	1.000	0.427
Debate	1.000	0.713
Language	1.000	0.569
Computer	1.000	0.613
Business	1.000	0.851
Cultural	1.000	0.635
Others	1.000	0.604

Source: Field Survey;

Most private universities have debating club, activities of which are organized indoor and do not require additional infrastructure. The share of the business students is

largest amongst all disciplines in the private universities. Therefore, the Business Department receives considerable attention by the authority and it attempts to engage students in activities successfully. But they are not happy with the facilities of sports club and language club. The sports club receives poor attention by the private universities because of lack of infrastructure and pressure of regular academic responsibilities may have caused such a condition. Similarly, in case of physical environment of the universities, the students are satisfied with the classroom, exam hall, auditorium, and common room, but they are not quite happy with the medical centre and students had moderate satisfaction over the location of the campus and canteen *(See Table 3)*.

Table 3: Factor Analysis of Physical Environment output the Extraction Method: Principle Component Analysis

Variables	Initial	Extraction
Campus	1.000	0.500
Classroom	1.000	0.616
Medical	1.000	0.496
Exam	1.000	0.639
Auditorium	1.000	0.604
Canteen	1.000	0.547
Common room	1.000	0.664

Source: Field Survey;

At present most of the private universities are located within the city limits and housed in buildings some of which are not suitable for a university. According to the UGC regulations, the private universities are required to develop their own campus within five years of their inception (UGC Report, 2005). However, most of the private universities have failed totally to have their own campus (Haque, 2004) and there rented campus is not at all congenial for academic, mental, and physical development of the students. Among the students of private universities 32.3% students consider that the space is not sufficient alternatively, 38.7% students have no complains regarding space. But Haque (2004) explains that space problem has also impeded the congenial academic atmosphere to a great extent. In addition, students are not satisfied with the medical center. It is due to the fact that most of the private universities do not have their own medical center.

Some Students of this survey stated that they are not fully satisfied with their library. Though among these students 38.7% consider that the library has enough materials and they do not face any problem while preparing any notes. But according to the printed articles most of private university have very poor library (Haque, 2004). Although there are 53 private universities in the country most of the universities do not have rich library and other facilities good enough to cater to the need of the students. Reference books and relevant foreign journal containing the least information are hardly available in the library of these universities, which are in fact very poorly equipped with necessary reading materials and other modern electronic devices. Interestingly, they are very much satisfied with the attitude of their faculties as they provide enough time for discussion and questions and answer sessions, which is 61.3% (satisfaction level). So, a student's satisfaction level varies from person to person in case of different factors. But in general it is observed that all of the surveyed students of private universities are satisfied with the services provided by the universities.

According to Siddiqi (2006) the performance of a university is bound to be poor if the academic programs or degrees offered are not market-oriented, teachers hired are not adequately qualified, students admitted are of poor quality, inadequate infrastructure facilities namely- class rooms, administrative offices, internet services, automated library, computer and other labs, cafeteria, students' lounge etc. students of public universities are more satisfied with these factors than that of the private universities students. For instance, the public university students have access to large campus. However, in comparison with public universities the new private universities are more 'market responsive' (Canen and Canen, 2001; Clarke, 1997; Muller and Subotzky, 2001) and the management system of public university is not as satisfactory as the private university because of session jam, terrorism etc. Though the campus of public universities is a very attractive issue for the students, but the students face serious problems because of the rigid, ineffective, and non-responsive management system.

4.2 Substantive Findings

The results of the study proved that the necessary infrastructure facilities are satisfactory in the surveyed private universities and teachers' attitudes are satisfying according to the students. In addition, it is also observed that the growth rate of students is more than 6 times higher than the public university.

Every year huge number of students passed from the higher secondary class and the public universities do not have the capacity to cater, the needs of most of the students want to have a university graduation (Ittefaq, 2006). Private universities are playing a great role for bridging the gap. The mash-room growth of private universities in the countries indicates that they are more business proposition except few. According to the informed sources, the number of private university is increasing fast but at the same time quality of their education is falling at a similar space on the other hand. It is evident that on key attributes private universities have gained acceptance from the students and have managed to contribute considerably to the tertiary education sector of Bangladesh. This overall positive evaluation of the private universities of the surveyed students contradicts the observation made by many experts on many occasions in their respective articles published in different dailies (Siddiqi, 2006), (Haque, 2004), (Ahmed, 2003), (Rahman, 2003), (Sumon, 2004), (Cookson, 2004). It could be the result of response bias of the surveyed students, as they do not feel comfortable in delivering negative impressions of their own universities. As they have no other option for higher education, so they are trying to uplift the position of private universities. Also it could be due to the fact that only the students of top six universities were surveyed, of these four of the universities are been reported as good universities by UGC. That is why the students' view that is gathered from the survey is totally different from the view of the intellectuals. This conclusion may be counterchecked by having an elaborate survey on many other private universities including the universities ranked as average or poor performers by UGC.

Then the question is why the performance is not satisfactory except in two or three cases? Who is responsible for this poor performance? Is it only the sponsor or the university management as well? Actually, hosts of factors are responsible for this situation. One of the main reasons is that the defective government policy reflected in the Private University Act 1992. Bangladesh is perhaps the only country in the world where private universities do not get any support (scholarship, research fund, campus facilities etc.) from the government. The quality of teaching is regarded as paramount because it is clear that future development of teaching and learning can be threatening due to the fact that higher education institutions will have to compete for resources such as funding and students. On the other hand, the research clearly influence the shaping of

the higher education sector to a considerable extent primarily because of associated selectivity of public, private and government research funding. Bangladesh Government needs to review the present attitude to the private universities considering the future of the country. Moreover, the universities of Bangladesh should maintain some quality requirements, one of which is related with human agents and physical infrastructures (i.e. quality of policy making, management, academic staff, support staff, students and the physical infrastructures) and second one is focused on the quality of programs, delivery systems, support services and evaluation schemes. Universities should have strategic plan which is very crucial for the quality of education.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite of all the shortcomings, which have made the people most worried, is the poor quality of education offered by most of the private university of the country. The concept of private universities has been successful in many countries including the USA, UK, Japan, and Australia. It is about a decade that private universities are a common sight in the educational arena of Bangladesh (Khan, 2004). The government of Bangladesh evaluated the performance of private universities and found gross irregularities such as low quality education, false statement about students and teachers, temporary and overcrowded campuses and complete lack of administration in eight universities and decided to close down five universities among them (Mahmud, 2006). In a very recent development the Education Ministry of the country in a press conference has labeled the universities into three categories--'red', 'yellow' and 'green' on the basis of their infrastructural development. The universities which failed to establish necessary infrastructures on their permanent campuses will get additional five years from now on to go to their permanent campuses (Daily Star, 2010). Reviewing the situations prevailing in the private universities government in the same press conference has asked the private universities to retain credibility and transparency, maintain the highest student quality, and design a broad based liberal arts curriculum and emphasize on research and scholarly activities.

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