

## Quality Assurance in Higher Education

by Dr Mawdudur Rahman

Many forward thinking academic institutions that care to deliver value-added education, treat their students as customers. "Customer satisfaction" and "customer intimacy" are the two key phrases frequently heard in such academic atmosphere.

they are not friends of education.

Innovation in education delivery model is necessary to overcome the external threat and create an internally harmonious education system. All systems survive by adapting to the environment. Environment is a system of systems. Systems, though contribute to their immediate environment, have very little power to change the environment. Systems adapt to the environment. The antiquated educational system is responsible for lamentably poor quality of education in Bangladesh and is partly responsible for creating the discord in the environment.

Therefore, without blaming frequent strikes one should think about a delivery system that will not be hindered by frequent strikes. Answers should be sought in innovation in educational system through the use of technology, changing delivery modes, restructuring the faculty processes drastically, useful configuration of instructional resources, defining and redesigning the curriculum processes, and introducing effective student processes.

#### Responsibility of Teachers

Again, a large majority (87 per cent) of the respondents thinks that teachers are accountable for educational quality.

It is (Question 2). It should be noted that these respondents were erstwhile teachers or are teachers now. This is a fair statement that teachers are the backbone of quality in education. They not only deliver the programs they also participate in managing the institutions. Why then there are no serious attempts by the teachers in this direction? I will suggest that the answer is in inadequate and antiquated faculty processes like, recruitment, development, remuneration, review, promotion, tenure (permanent status), and termination. Effective administration of these processes is essential for successful recruitment, retention, and promotion (increase) of qualified and responsible faculty members.

In the public universities faculty recruitment processes are so much maligned by the political interests that the educational goals no longer is the priority or at all a consideration. The qualified people have to wait for years for recruitment or promotion for the right political group to take the charge of the top administration. In private universities the need for cost saving or managing within available resources seriously hurt the quality. Many of them package ambitious programmes for recruiting and graduating students and not for recruiting qualified faculty. Faculty recruitment and development

suffer in the hands of people who have either political or financial motives and not the enhancement of academic quality.

#### Copying Foreign Educational Systems

Bangladeshi education system should not continue to copy the antiquated British system or model itself based on the US or other foreign systems. Question 6 asks the participants about copying foreign curricula. Copying foreign curricula is not a desirable option in the opinion of 87 per cent of the respondents. But if one looks at the reality, the unrestrained copying of foreign curricula is going on everywhere.

Indiscriminate copying of US systems will not be appropriate for Bangladeshi environment nor the continuous intrusion of British systems. The leaders in education in private and public sectors should seriously consider this issue. The new private universities may not be delivering what they are promising. They may be selling what is called the old wine in a new bottle. The parents and the students should carefully evaluate the value of a degree from any institutions. Questions 6, 8, and 9 also address the systems issues.

#### Students

Do the students study diligently enough (Question 3)? No, they don't was the majority answer. Who knows why the don't? Did anybody try to know the reasons behind this? Of course not. Again, the answer is not in the environment but in the student processes that are used to admit, retain, teach, graduate, and motivate students for life long learning. Many forward thinking academic institutions that care to deliver value-added education, treat their students as customers. "Customer satisfaction" and "customer intimacy" are the two key phrases frequently heard in such academic atmos-

sphere. Their needs are carefully monitored; they receive intrusive advising, tutoring, and study group helps to meet the demands from the programs and the teachers. Students need more than a few class visits by professors to learn from a course. Four walls, some chairs and desks, and a talking body do not make a learning classroom for students to study diligently.

#### Academic Politics

Of the total respondent administrators, 79.2 per cent think that academic politics is not conducive to quality education (Question 5). No academic system is pure from politics. Healthy academic politics helps raise the quality. When faculty recruitment and promotion are used as tools for political support this must contribute to the deterioration of quality. Academic politics is self-destructive when the institution is driven by political ambitions of the academic administrators and not by the academic mission of the institutions. Selection or election of top administrators should be based on the relevant quality of the person needed for the position. This is true for both private and public universities. People who do not have any academic administrative background head many of the newly-established private universities. The entrepreneurs of private universities in most cases are not academic administrators. For the sake of quality they need qualified top academic administrators and keep the control of the organizations for themselves.

#### Who is the Boss

Top administrators believe that they don't have the answers to all questions (Question 7). Yet everybody goes to them for any simple decision. Nobody wants to take responsibility or nobody wants to give up au-

thority. Probably like everywhere, universities suffer from acute delegation upward and centralization in decision making. People must be able to take decisions and must take responsibility. If the vice-chancellor remains very busy signing files after files and is obliged to engage in political negotiations, where will he/she have time to think and lead.

#### Personal Responsibility and Compensation

The answer to "alone cannot contribute to quality" is almost equally divided (Question 8). What else would have been the answer? If each person do his or her job right without looking for others to do theirs, that will contribute to quality. Doing the preparation for the class, learning to teach the right thing, being aware of the student's needs (customer intimacy) all will contribute to quality. Question for quality is an endless pursuit. In a quality oriented institution individuals accept full responsibility to accomplish the institutional objectives with the framework of personal mastery and shared vision.

Personal mastery is one's personal vision within the current reality and the ability to reduce the gap between the two. Shared vision is what organizational participants want to do and create together.

Compensation is always an issue in any institution. This is not surprising that 70 per cent thinks inadequate compensation is a major reason to quality deterioration (Question 10).

Higher compensations must be deserved by anybody anywhere. Has it been systematically proved that indeed real compensation is inappropriate given the outcome achieved? Inappropriate faculty processes within the system will explain inadequate compensation.

#### The Traffic Jam in Dhaka City

The question was "Can the traffic jam in Dhaka City be solved?" This question is a leading question designed to assess perceptions of the participants in general to an unrelated problem. Yes was the answer of 78 per cent respondents. An-

other 22 per cent do not think so. It shows that majority of the people have positive outlook about many serious problems. It also has given some measure of validity to the responses. The suggestion is that no problem is unsolvable. There will always be some unbelievers. The traffic jam can be solved through system redesign within the same environment. Then, why not the quality problem in education. It is not different from any other problem.

#### Vision and Mission

I did not discuss the question on vision and mission. The purpose of the question was to assess the awareness among people about vision and mission. The number of responses shows that knowledge of vision and mission is not widespread. How does each private or public institution differ from the other? They are different because they differ in their missions and visions. What are the mission and vision of a public university or any private uni-

#### Conclusion

The conclusion is obvious. Educational administrators and faculty members are aware of and concerned about the quality problem in higher education. There is genuine interest in doing something about it. The problem is that hardly anybody knows what that something is and how to implement any change.

Quality assurance in higher education needs three things:

1. Strong and dynamic leadership
2. Long-term perspective,

3. Commitment to quality

I suggest that each institution should address the issue through innovative systems and appropriate long-term strategies. Some bold and drastic measures are necessary to assure the quality of higher education. If quality cannot be assured real and virtual migrations of students to foreign universities will only accelerate.

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## How Can I be Involved in My Child's Education?

### A NEW PARADIGM FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT

by Tajul Islam

ment," in which administrators share the responsibility for operating schools with teachers, students, parents, and community members. You can become involved in committees that govern your child's school or join the local parent-teacher association (if any) or regularly visit the parent-teacher meetings as and when arranged. Check the school's list of events show interest in them.

You, as a parent, has important knowledge about your child's dislikes, needs, and problems that the school may not be aware of. You may also have ideas for improving your child's school. But even though studies show that most parents want to be involved in their children's education, they may not be exactly sure how to go about it, especially if, in most cases, they work during the school day.

Parents often ask the following questions:

**What Can I Do to Involve Myself with My Child's School?**

Some schools value parent involvement by providing numerous opportunities for parents to interact with each other, with teachers, and with students. Your child's school can provide ideas on how to participate. One important way you can become involved in your child's schooling is to exercise any choice available in the selection of course work, programmes, or even schools. Many schools are moving towards "school-based manage-

ment," in which administrators share the responsibility for operating schools with teachers, students, parents, and community members. You can become involved in committees that govern your child's school or join the local parent-teacher association (if any) or regularly visit the parent-teacher meetings as and when arranged. Check the school's list of events show interest in them.

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possible with prior arrangement.

• Volunteer to help in the classroom as an assistant (listening to children read, for example, or serving as an aide during computer work), seek school's co-operation on the matter. It is possible at junior levels, if not senior classes.

• Support student events and performances by helping with them (such as sewing costumes or painting scenery for a school play) and by attending them. Find out if your child participates in co-curricular activities.

• If your school has a Parent's Room/Lounge or Parent Centre, drop in to meet other parents and teachers there or to pick up information and materials. This can be regularly done when you visit to pay fees, when you collect/drop your child for any function or at least twice a month with your children after school hours. Let your child know that you will visit/meet his/her teachers. Ask him/her to inform the teacher concerned.

• Participate in meetings, function or workshops that are offered, such as those on child development or concerns that parents have (or help plan such workshops). Don't rely on verbal notice by your child. Write in child's diary on the related matter and ask him/her get it signed by the teacher.

• Take advantage of parent-teacher contacts (perhaps agreeing to read with your child for a certain amount of time each night), or on weekends and during vacation/holidays.

• Visit your child's classroom; a visit will give you an idea of what your child does at school and how he or she interacts with other children. This is

possible with prior arrangement.

• Reward progress; use lots of praise, display good work.

• Ask your child's teacher if he or she has materials that you can use to help your child at home and to supplement homework. You may encourage your child to write articles for junior magazines and ensure subscription of weekly/monthly magazines. Read together, read for pleasure. Motivate, never force.

• Be part of decision-making committees about school issues and problems, such as a parent advisory committee. Get in touch with Head Teacher/Coordinators and meet them every month. Develop cordial relations. Don't be offensive if you hear complaints. Take it smilingly and ask for suggestions or remedial measures from the complainant.

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