

# Future of higher education in Bangladesh

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Higher education is considered a very significant area for any country's socio, political and economic development. Throughout history universities have played a very important role in generating and disseminating knowledge, much to the benefit of human beings and human civilizations. As creators and purveyors of knowledge, the universities' contributions are widely accepted in the societies and seldom require any elaboration.

However, with the advent of globalisation, the communication revolution and the emergence of the neo-liberal economy as the dominant economic ideology, universities are now undergoing rapid transformations. Massive privatisation is now taking place in the education sector in place of only state-owned initiatives. Curriculum is changing in order to accommodate state of the art scientific research and innovations.

Concomitantly, there are transformations in classroom pedagogical techniques also. Quality assurance has become a major issue as universities are ranked nationally, regionally and globally. World-class universities of the west have started penetrating into developing countries' educational sector through Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). They started offering free online courses first, but now they are charging money for certificates. Students of developing countries are

rushing to get their certificates and diplomas overlooking their own countries' institutes. Universities throughout the developing world are now grappling to find ways to catch up with the new trends in higher education. By introducing a new curriculum, teaching and learning methodologies and technologies, universities are striving hard to responding to the challenges of the 21st century.

Higher education in Bangladesh is in a state of flux while responding to the challenges of globalisation in a local way. The privatisation policies of government in line with the neo-liberal economy have resulted in mushrooming growth of new universities day in, day out that are mainly concentrated in larger cities of Bangladesh. Public universities are also being allowed to open profitable part-time or evening programmes to meet the growing demands of the students. The positive side of these developments is that it could control the outflow of capital to foreign countries—keeping the students in Bangladesh. But the developments have also opened up a host of issues and challenges for Bangladesh. These are, inter alia, rapid deterioration of standard of education, absence of a strong quality assurance mechanisms and more importantly, a clear-cut vision of higher education in the 21st century. Bangladesh must identify the challenges in the area of higher education and should take some policy measures. The policies should include



vision and target setting, training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) arrangements for the teachers to enhance their pedagogical skills, ICT integration in teaching and learning, developing strong quality assurance mechanisms and the like.

It is now a truism that universities in Bangladesh cannot figure prominently in the global ranking of universities. The status of universities is declining very rapidly at the global level. In fact, all the universities of SAARC (South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation) countries, barring a few, are poorly ranked in international rankings. A couple of years back The Economist observed that in South Asia

“the disconnect between the needs of the market and the courses offered by higher education institutions has contributed to high levels of graduate unemployment and underemployment.”

In a more recent report, The Economist observed that education quality is low in universities in South Asia and employers have mentioned two types of skills shortages: (a) not enough graduates in specialised skills needed within high growth sectors, and (b) where graduates have these skills, they are still not employable because skills in English language, computer, communication and problem-solving abilities are absent.

Lack of professionalism and skills of the teachers is one of the reasons of low quality products. In Bangladesh, professional development for teachers at the higher level is just confined to getting a vertical degree i.e. a PhD degree in the respective disciplines. Getting a PhD degree in their respective disciplines is considered as the highest form of professional development, and university teachers are seldom trained further regarding pedagogical skills. To put it more simply, discipline-specific knowledge development only gets preference and promoted, but other aspects of teaching and learning strategies are overlooked.

On the other hand, though many public and private universities in Bangladesh have made massive investments in modernising their institutes, it is often found that teachers are reluctant to use the newer strategies in teaching and learning, and many opportunities remain under-utilised. If the higher institutes of learning in third world countries like Bangladesh do not act with serious urgency, they would be on the wrong side of the rapidly widening knowledge and technology gap. The universities of the developing world like Bangladesh lag far behind, not just because of the shortage of resources—lack of knowledge, and mind-sets of the teachers and administrators are responsible to some extent.

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