

RESEARCH PAPER
ON
PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH

Course: Composition and communication skill

Course code: ENG102

Semester: Summer 2009

Submitted by:

Md. Muhibur Rahman

Undergraduate Student

Department of Business Administration

East West University

Date of submission: 12 August, 2009.



East West University

Private Higher Education in Bangladesh

Bangladesh appears to have realized a decent economic development since the late 1990s. This economic development also reflected in the education sector of the country. In this period higher education in Bangladesh has shown a significant expansion, particularly in private sector. But our govt. did not utilize this sector in a proper way. There are also quality, financial and other problems with most of the private universities of our country. By analyzing the present situations of private universities government have to think how this sector can contribute to our national development.

There were mainly two types of higher education institutions: the highly competitive public universities and a large number of degree colleges affiliated with universities. When these two types of institutions failed to satisfy the necessity of huge number of HSC passing students, then the government had to think about higher education in private sector. Then government approved the Private University Act 1992 and established North South University as the first private university. During the 1990s, around 20 government recognized private universities were established, with the number increasing to 54 by the end of 2005. The Independent reports that, about 80 percent of our private universities are based in the capital city, Dhaka, where 6 percent of the total population of the country live and are lucky enough to enjoy the benefit of private universities. The remaining 94 percent people have little or no idea about private universities. Only seven universities have so far been established in two divisional towns but there campuses are in Dhaka.

The number of students attending private universities has also increased rapidly from 6200 at 16 universities in 1997 to 44600 at 52 universities in 2003. In comparison, the numbers

for public universities increased from 74000 students at 11 universities in 1997 to 104700 at 21 universities in 2003. Although the number of students enrolled in public universities remains higher, the pace of increase for enrolment in private universities seems to have accelerated.

Almost all private universities are same in character. These universities are owned by some people and also funded by them. Private universities are not operated by government though they might not receive funding. These institutions generally managed by the board of directors of the universities. Most of the private universities offer same type of courses, which are job oriented and have greater market demand. They mainly offer degrees in Business Administration, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Telecom Engineering, English, Law etc. But some universities also offer degrees in unfamiliar subjects such as Agribusiness, Development studies, Journalism and Media studies, Advertising, Pharmacy, economics, Microbiology, Applied physics, Bengali etc. All these universities provide undergraduate and graduate level courses. As they do not have accreditation to provide higher level degrees like M.Phil, PhD etc. Some universities also offer non degree or diploma courses in different discipline. But the good news is that, many top private universities are introducing new courses every year.

Private universities award degrees themselves. They are supervised by the academic administrative rules set by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of the country. Many well known private universities have collaboration or arrangement to transfer academic credits to number of USA and Canadian universities. These universities awarded degrees are recognized by different Asian and US-European universities.

It is a strange matter that our government even any local organization do not provide any measurement of quality or provide any rating regarding universities (both public and private). So

its very hard to measure the quality of these universities. The economist Dr. Akbar Ali commented that:

We have introduce the western styles education system, especially in private universities but we didn't introduce the rating system while authorities of the western universities publish the rating of their educational institutions regularly.
(qtd. in The Daily Star)

Sometime these universities also ranked according to some international ranking such as ranking Webometrics which shows that five Bangladeshi private universities are in the list of top 100 universities of South Asia. These five universities are University of Asia Pacific, BRAC University, East West University, Independent University of Bangladesh and American International University-Bangladesh. The UGC report also mentioned that out of total number of private universities roughly eight universities (eg. NSU, EWU, IUB, AIUB, BRAC, IIUC etc.) are performing highly satisfactory. Another ten private universities are also performing well and at an acceptable level. But these ranking does not based on proper research and does not include accurate information about the universities.

Although universities should be measured by their research activities but private universities of our country are very poor regarding research activities. According to Expansion and Quality in Bangladesh “Many of the faculty members in these universities appear unmotivated to conduct their own academic research due to such problems as a lack of research funding, absence of research material, heavy teaching load.” Another problem of private universities is high tuition fees. As these universities do not get any subsidize from the government, they use to maintain their huge cost by taking high tuition fees from the students.

Bangladesh state level agencies BSS, BANBEIS even UGC do not publish any comprehensive or regular data on placement of the students of private universities. The top private universities show in their websites and newsletter that their most of the graduate can find jobs in different multinational firms, financial institutions, banks and educational institutions. Some other can established them by self employment. Most of the cases it has been shows that the salary of these graduates are significantly above the income level of graduate from public universities (except IBA of DU).

Our government can uplift the quality of the private higher education sector by taking some initiatives. Government can create accreditation council for universities, strengthened UGC to control private universities and force them to follow all rules and regulations. And by introducing the rating system government can create a good competition among all universities, which will help to improve their quality. The rating must be from a competent authority. University Grant Commission could take up the job. The ranking will be based on certain parameters which should be selected on the basis of international exercise.

Government can use these good numbers of universities to develop rural part of the country. For developing a region the best way is to establish a university, because the most talented and skilled persons are involved in a university. They can develop a area by sharing their knowledge with local people. And if the Dhaka-based universities are shifted to the district level towns, a greater number of people will be benefited. So, our government can relocate the private universities to develop all area equally.

If the universities are properly organized and managed, they can earn foreign currencies as well as prestige for the country through enrolment of foreign students. In this issue Prof.

Lutfur Rahman, Vice-Chancellor, Pundra University of Science and Technology said to Daily Independent:

Bangladesh could thus be one of the best place for higher education and be well known to the global community as “country of universities.”

It is not unfair to state that the private university subsector in Bangladesh has come to stay. Education sector takes time to develop and is a continuous process. The private university sector of our country is not very old yet it is providing world class education. Some scholars and practitioners observe that the expansion of the private sector higher education in Bangladesh provides healthy competition for the public sector. The advent of so many private universities in Bangladesh is a very positive sign for the development of Bangladesh. Bangladesh can achieve one of the top positions in the global market through establishing an excellent environment for private sector higher education in the country.

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