

Managing the Paradox of Public-Private University Funding: Bangladesh Context

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Background

- Bangladesh is an over populated country in the world
- Prior to genesis of private university in 1981, financially solvent HSC graduates moved to the foreign countries, especially neighboring countries for their graduations.
- The crucial reason behind the rise of private university was the large number of HSC graduates (roughly 145,000 in 2001) every year but the public university had the capacity to enroll only 17 percent of these students.

Background Continues

- Due to this increasing trend, The number of yearly increase in the enrolments was 5% in the public universities but that of the private universities was 20%.
- At present, in 2017, out of the total 132 universities, only 37 are public and the rest 95 are private universities.
- There has been a lot of debates about facilities, and quality of education of the private universities.

Background Continues

- Educationist and government personnel have mixed reactions regarding this issue.
- As academics and management of a private university, we sought to investigate this contradictory issue.

Purpose

- Our main purpose was to look at the overall scenario from private university management, intellectual and government perspectives and summarize both problems and prospects.
- We also made a list of recommendations for improvement of the situation.

Methods

- We collected data from several workshops, roundtable debates of the renowned educationist and government authorities, and findings of journal articles.
- We also considered our experiences and observations of the latest situation to discern the findings.

Drawbacks and Prospects

First of all, we present the summarized findings on drawbacks and prospects and made comments on the discussed issues.

Quality of Education: There has been a lot of debate about the unsatisfactory quality of education. This is true in case of a certain percentage of the private universities. A few renowned personalities acknowledged that a large number of the private universities are doing an excellent job. They also termed these universities as 'centre of excellence'.

Drawbacks and Prospects contd.

Approval Process: The approval process in case of any changes in the curriculum or launching a new program is very lengthy. This is very frustrating for the teachers, students and administration. However, this process is very easy for public universities.

Lack of Research: Private universities are blamed for not being able to increase their research activities. The reality is: no private university is allowed to offer PhD Programs. This is one of the main drawbacks. Most of the entrants are undergraduate but the question is what kind of research can they do?

Drawbacks and Prospects contd.

Funding and Operational Costs of Public Universities:

Funding is the biggest challenge of the private universities. It is obvious that much difference will not be found between the operational cost of state owned public university and the private university. The public university students are enjoying almost free education due to substantial government fund, while the private university students have to pay more money to meet the cost of everything, such as, capital investment, infrastructure development, instructional materials and resources, equipment, etc.

Drawbacks and Prospects contd.

Proliferation of Information Technology (IT):

It has been observed that a few well-known private universities have built their IT infrastructure far better than the public universities for operating administrative, financial and academic activities.

A few private universities have created blended learning environment for student interaction and effective learning.

Drawbacks and Prospects contd.

Contribution to National Revenue of the Government:

Apparently, a large number of university graduates are passing out from these universities every year. Of this number, a portion starts their career as entrepreneurs. Majority of the rest undertake a job in various capacities in the national and international job sectors. The graduate entrepreneurs also employ a large number of staff in course of time. This means, this big number pays a substantial amount of taxes to the government from their salary. On the other hand, the government pays nothing to the private universities.

Recommendations

- An accreditation body must be operated by the government is required to evaluate the standard and quality of both private and public universities. It may remove contradictions and ensure transparency.
- A government owned organization should be established for imparting training to the university teachers for transition from a teacher centered to a student centered learning. Eventually, it will improve classroom delivery techniques of the teachers and standard of education.
- An appropriate entity should be established at each university as well as each sub-section to support and oversee research activities of the university. A powerful academic team of the university should be appointed for undertaking this task.
- The private universities who have name and fame should be allowed to offer PhD programs in several disciplines if they have relevant experts and scholars. In the long run, it will create own expert resources.
- Along with the public university teachers, the government should allow the private university teachers to apply for foreign scholarships announced by the governments round the year.

Recommendations contd.

- The private university may be given a substantial amount of fund every year as research grant. It may have a positive impact for solving several problems related to industry and environment. It will also improve overall quality of education and ranking of the universities in future.
- The relevant body of the government should be generous in processing curriculum development and offering new programs for approval. They should also reduce the time for processing rather than keeping on hold for several months and years.
- Since the government cannot deal with the tertiary level education alone and the private universities are playing an important role to solve this national problem, the government may declare the private universities as the tax free institutions. This money may be used for improvement of teaching and learning and research activities of the university.
- A concrete policy for supply chain of education is necessary, because, the universities itself cannot change or improve every aspect of the students in four years, if quality is not maintained in the lower levels of the education system that is, from primary to higher secondary.

Conclusions

It is obvious that the government of Bangladesh cannot deal with the very large number of university entrants every year. Private university is the best solution to manage this growing number of students seeking higher education. However, quality measurement of all the universities (public and private) should be a part of the government. The government should monitor as well as provide financial support whatever ways are possible to the private universities, who are, maintaining standard of education.