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QUALITY AND COST OF EDUCATION AT PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

An exploratory survey was conducted to analyze the consumers' evaluation of private higher education sectors in Bangladesh with particular reference to the quality as well as the cost of education. The sample was taken on a random basis from about ten private universities in Dhaka metropolitan area. The respondents (students) were asked to evaluate the quality and the cost of education at private universities in Bangladesh. Respondents ranked the attributes on a number of itemized seven-point scale ratings bounded at each end by one of two bipolar adjectives. The result of this study shows that faculty credentials, academic calendar, campus facility, research facility and cost of education are associated with quality education and that the consumers feel most of the private universities in Bangladesh provide quality education at reasonable costs.

Keywords: Quality education Cost of education and Private universities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the enactment of Private Universities Act of 1992, Bangladesh has seen a tremendous growth in private educational platforms over the recent years mainly through the emergence of a large number of universities in private sector. Yet, this growth has also a downside to it as rapid expansion entails a risk of compromise on quality and expenses. However, the combined effect is a vibrant education sector in agog with healthy rivalry among the competing institutions. Undoubtedly, the main beneficiary is the student community through gaining access to a wider platform of selection with a domestic comparative cost advantage over studying abroad. Thus, the society and the nation are the ultimate gainers (Chowdhury, 2004).

Surprisingly, about 95 per cent of these universities are located in Dhaka Metropolitan areas. While in the year 2000, the number of these universities was only 17, today it has reached a total of 53 (Kabir, 2006). Obviously, this growth rate seems unhealthy in consideration of the per capita income of the country and also in terms of quality assurance of higher education, because education in these universities is much more

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ies of Bangladesh. One most familiar feature of these American method of education rather than the British model. They offer four-year bachelor degree programs with credit based course. This system has also created a popular appeal in Bangladesh. Still, there have been the concerns of the regulators as well as the consumers in terms of the service quality, design and costs (Haque, 2004). This study is, thus, an attempt to examine the opinion or satisfaction level of the consumers (students) only on the quality and the cost of education of the private sector in Bangladesh.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a review of theoretical meaning of the term “quality” in order to identify quality dimensions, its measurement and implications at the level of private higher education institutions. Literature review is presented in section 3. In section 4, the research method utilized in this study is described. Section 5 presents the data analysis and its interpretations. Conclusive remarks are drawn in the section 6.

2. WHAT ARE QUALITY AND QUALITY IN EDUCATION?

Whenever quality in education is mentioned it may be vital to mirror on what is understood by the term quality, because different professionals such as educators, researchers and politicians purview this term differently. The term “quality” is derived from the Latin word “*qualitas*” that means the degree of excellence of a thing (Oxford Dictionary, 2003).

Coombs (1985) defines the word quality as:

“...qualitative dimensions mean more than the quality of education as customarily defined and judged by student learning achievements, in terms of traditional curriculum and standards. Quality...also pertains to the relevance of what is taught and learned --- to how well it fits the present and future needs of the particular learners in question, given their particular circumstances and prospects. It also refers to significant changes in the educational system itself, in the nature of its inputs; its objectives, curricula and educational technologies; and its socioeconomic, cultural and political environment.” (p.105)

In terms of quality in education the World Bank (1995) put forwards as:

“Quality in education is difficult to define and measure. An adequate definition must include student outcomes. Most educators would also include in the definition the nature of the educational experiences that help to produce thus outcomes --- the learning environment.” (p.46)

Murgatroyd and Morgan (1994) offer two different definitions of quality. One is related to quality assurance and the other is from consumers’ points of view, which are as follows:

to the determination of standards, appropriate assessments by an expert body, accompanied by a process of inspection or evaluation that examines the extent to which practice meets these standards; and

“Consumer-driven quality refers to a notion of quality in which those who are to receive a product or service make explicit their expectations for this product or service and quality is defined in terms meeting or exceeding the expectations of customers.” (P.45-46)

Murgatroyd and Morgan argue that the quality concept is loaded with a customer-driven perspective, which is a derivative of economic theories. In fact, service quality has now become an important dimension of education providers similar to any other business organizations. Hence, customer evaluation of the quality of their education should be an integral part of total quality management in any of the organizations (Haque, 2004).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are a large number of reports and theoretical work on quality from the perspective of quality assurance and quality improvement. In many of them, research scholars have identified different views on the issue of quality education and its determining factors. However, a very limited empirical work is available on this particular issue. Andaleeb (2003) analyzed seven issues crucial for effective fostering of higher education in Bangladesh. Those are teaching quality, method, content, peer quality, direct facilities, indirect facilities and political climate. Sabur (2004) compared the private and public educations on the basis of quality assurance. He discussed several points of debate rather than prescribing any solutions to resolve the problems regarding the quality of education in two different platforms. Spanbauer (1992) discussed the need for educational institutions to have a quality policy. Lamanga (2002) highlighted three different aspects in measuring quality education in private universities in Bangladesh. They are quality of teaching and research, responsiveness to the demands of the labor market and equity. Dhali (1999) emphasizes on techniques of students' evaluation procedures, which he classifies as formative and summative. In Lamanga's (2006) report on the quality assurance in tertiary education in the case of Bangladesh, he recommended several initiatives in his paper that can ultimately ensure a quality education system in the higher learning institutions in the country. Aminuzzaman (2007) noted that most departments of the universities do not have long-term national vision, but such a vision is crucial to quality education. According to Aminuzzaman:

"Quality education in universities will be achieved through changing the method of teaching and learning as well as assessment methods, renewing the curriculum continually, updating and upgrading professional knowledge and skills and improving the broader educational, administrative and resource environments,"

With respect to cost of private university education Kotler (2003) is succinct to mention that, cost is a foregoing measure or an exchange price or a sacrifice made to secure a

on, according to Kotler, means the sacrifice made or (costs) to achieve specific objective of learning.

Previous findings have reported results mostly based on only theoretical considerations. Given the circumstances, present study takes an initiative to make an empirical investigation based on a new approach of evaluating the quality as well as the cost of education in the private sector of Bangladesh. The findings from this study are valuable in guiding the professionals and policy makers to formulate further the effective educational policy in the country.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main source of data used was a field level survey conducted during the last spring session of 2007 in some selected private universities of Dhaka city. A structured questionnaire was used in the survey. The respondents (students) were asked to what degree the quality and costs of education services offered by the private universities corresponded to their expectations on the 36 variables related to 7 dimensions of quality-cost perception difference model. The items were applied to measure on a 7 point "Likert type" scale (Likert 1932). In the measurement, scale 1 indicates strongly disagree and scale 7 indicates strongly agree. The questionnaire was pre-tested on students and finally data were collected from 460 students enrolled in different batches of the bachelor programs. Then the sample of 360 is drawn on a random selection basis. The students have been interviewed through personal visits to the university campuses. The respondents select the appropriate point the best indicates how they would describe the attributes being rated.

The reliability test has been conducted to verify the internal consistency of the variables obtained in the sample. For this test, the Cronbach's alpha formula, $\alpha = N \cdot r / [1 + (N-1) \cdot r]$ has been used; where, N is the number of items and r is the average inter-item correlation among the items. The Cronbach's alpha value is found 0.8982, which is much higher than the minimum acceptable level suggested by Nunnally (1978). Several statistical analytical techniques such as Factor Analysis, Multiple Regression Analysis, ANOVA have been used to measure the level of quality education rendered by the private educational institutes in Bangladesh.

In order to measure the cost of education, the weighted average method was applied. The scale was converted 7 to +3, 6 to +2, 5 to +1, 4 to 0, 3 to -1, 2 to -2; and 1 to -3. The computed weighted average value for the particular variable would indicate the particular level of significance. As per method, more value is assigned more weight.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

A principal component factor analysis was conducted on the 36 variables related to quality and cost of education. This analysis yielded a 7 factor solution that explained 53% of the variance as represented in Table 1.

Students' Evaluation on Quality Education

| Factor Name | Variables | Factor Loading | % of Variance Explained | Cronbach's Reliability Coefficient |
|-----------------------|--|--|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Faculty Credentials | 1. Faculty's academic background 2. Teaching experience 3. Updated course contents 4. Faculty's communication skills 5. Faculty's fair treatments to students | .67 .61 .60 .65 .60 | 24.567 | .7412 |
| Class Room Facilities | 1. Atmosphere for learning 2. Modern teaching aids 3. Air-conditioned room 4. Spacious room 5. Neat and clean room | .72 .66 .48 .65 .63 | 7.023 | .8138 |
| Academic Calendar | 1. Maintaining strict schedules 2. Make-up class provision 3. Automated registration process 4. Timely completion of registration | .50 .69 .63 .63 | 6.072 | .5140 |
| Campus Facility | 1. Modern campus building 2. Transport facility 3. Dormitory facility 4. Canteen facility 5. Recreation & Gym facility 6. High speed Internet access 7. Rich library 8. Computer lab facility | .68 .55 .59 .74 .67 .61 .63 .60 | 4.545 | .7610 |
| Research Facility | 1. Support students' research works 2. Support faculty's research works 3. Existence of research center 4. Publication facilities | .66 .67 .56 .58 | 3.956 | .7153 |
| Cost of Education | 1. High tuition fees 2. Financial aids for poor students 3. Scholarship provision 4. On-campus job facility 5. Cost of study materials | .70 .57 .62 .65 .62 | 3.854 | .4725 |
| Quality Education | 1. Nation-wide recognition for excellent education 2. High paid graduates in job market 3. Foreign university affiliation 4. Students' pride 5. Faculty's availability for helping students | .64 .71 .60 .57 .58 | 3.521 | .7438 |

Faculty credentials, campus facility and research facility are important to students in their judgment of quality education. Thus, focusing on these factors would enable universities to achieve quality in private education.

Step-wise regression technique was then executed. Quality education and 6 orthogonal component factors were taken as dependent and independent variables respectively. Results are shown in Table 2. In the table, only significant variables are shown with their respective regression coefficients (β s) and computed student's t statistics.

Table 2: Results of Step-Wise Regression

| Variables | Betas | Computed t | Significance |
|--------------------------|-------|------------|--------------|
| Faculty credentials (FC) | .39 | 9.11 | .000*** |
| Academic calendar (AC) | .09 | 2.33 | .020* |
| Campus facility (CF) | .23 | 5.19 | .000*** |
| Research facility (RF) | .14 | 3.20 | .001** |
| Cost of education (COE) | .13 | 3.26 | .001** |

$R^2 = 53\%$; *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Faculty credential and campus facility were found to be statistically significant and positively related to quality education. The result shows that both factors are the most important components that ensure quality education. Similarly, the factors such as research facility and cost of education exhibited significant result. This statistical outcome indicates that these variables deserve more attention in the attempt to improve the quality education at private universities. Though the significance level of academic calendar is comparatively less than others, it also has to be addressed with equivalent focus for getting better quality of education.

Table 3: ANOVA for Regression

| Sources of Variation | Sum of Square | Degrees of Freedom | Mean Square | Computed F |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|-------------|------------|
| Regression | 200.752 | 5 | 40.150 | 79.586*** |
| Residual | 178.589 | 354 | .504 | |
| Total | 379.341 | 359 | | |

*** $p < .001$

Table 4 presents the cost of education on a scale of weighted average method. It can be concluded from the table that most of the respondents agree that tuition fees of the private universities are high. Equally likely, the universities have also been providing large number of scholarships and financial aids for the students. Thus, the high cost of education is getting offset by large number of scholarships and financial aids to some extent leading to reduced overall cost of education. Conclusively, it reflects the impression that the cost of education at private universities in Bangladesh is somewhat reasonable.

Table of Weighted Average Method

| | Strongly Agree +3 | Moderately Agree +2 | Simply Agree +1 | Neutral 0 | Simply Disagree -1 | Moderately Disagree -2 | Strongly Disagree -3 | Weighted Average Scores |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------|--------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Tuition fees are high | 107 | 79 | 53 | 47 | 40 | 15 | 19 | 1.12 |
| 2. Financial aids for poor students | 68 | 77 | 84 | 58 | 31 | 7 | 35 | .81 |
| 3. Large number of scholarships | 84 | 96 | 82 | 48 | 20 | 15 | 15 | 1.19 |
| 4. On-Campus job facility | 53 | 59 | 90 | 62 | 38 | 12 | 46 | .46 |
| 5. Study materials are expensive | 46 | 66 | 87 | 58 | 56 | 23 | 24 | .50 |

6. CONCLUSION

Private education in Bangladesh is getting more competitive with the remarkable increase in the number of the academic institutions in the country. Ineluctable forces of globalization, in fact, in this new millennium make this growth path more complex and challenging. Despite the relentless and continuous effort of the private educational institutions, the quality dimension has not yet achieved the desired level of expectation. Cost of private education is another dimension, which is somewhat affordable in Bangladesh, but still it deserves more efforts to bring that down. However, the system is proceeding gradually towards more improvement. Nevertheless, all the focused problems should be addressed more rigorously to ensure the quality of education in Bangladesh at desired level of expectation. This study has shed the light on the dimensions perceived by students to be associated with the quality of education. These dimensions are faculty credentials, academic calendar, campus facility, research facility and cost of education. The study also concludes that in general the cost of education in private universities in Bangladesh is reasonable due to the balance between increasing tuition fee and increasing number of financial aids and scholarship.

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