

Public Policy and Administration Research
ISSN 2224-5731(Paper) ISSN 2225-0972(Online)
Vol.2, No.5, 2012

www.iiste.org


Recruitment and Selection Process in Bangladesh Civil Service: A Critical Overview

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Abstract

An efficient civil service is essential for effective implementation of public policy and delivery of public services. To build an efficient civil service system, government must ensure that talented, competent and committed persons are recruited in the civil service. So the recruitment and selection process should be objective, uniform and of high quality. But it is very unfortunate that sound recruitment system for civil service does not exist in Bangladesh. Ensuring merit in public appointment is an important element of quality civil service. But merit has not given due importance in our recruitment policy. Reservation of posts, politicization of bureaucracy and faulty examination system are destroying the reputation of recruitment and selection process to be a fair and sound system. Against this backdrop this paper intends to assess and evaluate the existing recruitment and selection process of BCS and provide some suggestions to improve the present situation.

Key words: *Recruitment, Selection, Civil Service, Cadre Service, Merit, Equity.*

1. Introduction

Bangladesh needs a civil service of high quality and integrity for mobilizing and utilizing its domestic resources (Kim and Monem, 2008:2). In Bangladesh thousands of civil servants are recruited in various cadres almost every year. The quality of civil service is very much dependent on the caliber of individuals recruited. Here lies the importance of recruiting the best and the brightest candidates for civil service, who can make the bureaucracy an efficient, innovative, dynamic and powerful force to respond to the needs of the society.

With this background, this paper attempts to make an overview of the recruitment and selection process of the civil service in Bangladesh, particularly the process of direct recruitment in the cadre services. Firstly, the paper presents a conceptual overview. Secondly, it provides a description of the current recruitment and selection process of Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS). Thirdly, it makes a critical analysis of the existing process. Finally, it suggests recommendations and presents the conclusion of the study.

2. Research Methodology

This article is basically a review of secondary research conducted in this area. Data were collected from various published documents in the form of books, journals, government circulars, newspapers, research reports and internet browsing.

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1 Recruitment and Selection

Recruitment and selection are the central aspect of the civil service because an organization's ability to attract and retain capable employees can be the most important determinant of organizational effectiveness.

Recruitment is the process by which organizations locate and attract individuals to fill job vacancies (Kleiman, 2005). The primary purpose of recruiting is identifying and attracting potential employees. Recruitment is the process of searching for prospective employees and stimulating them to apply for jobs in the organization (Flippo and Edwin, 1984:141). Recruitment determines the nature of the applicant pool from which new employees are selected.

On the other hand, selection is the process by which organizations decide who will or will not be allowed to enter the jobs by assessing their qualifications through the utilization of appropriate methods, techniques and procedures. The objective of selection is to pick the right candidates who must meet the requirements of the job and the organization best.

3.2 Civil Service

Civil service becomes an essential part of governance in the modern era. The task of carrying out the state's business requires the establishment and functioning of structures generally manned by a body of government officials, collectively known as civil service. The term civil service includes all functionaries of the government excepting those in the military service (Report of the Pay and Services Commission, 1997). The military and elected officials of the Republic are excluded from this term.

According to Rai and Singh, the civil service means a professional body of neutral experts in administration dedicated to serve without regard to its own gains or without reference to party political views or class interests (Rai and Singh, 1979:26).

The civil service – that constitutes the administrative part of the government, symbolizes the image of 'good' or 'bad' governance of a state. The achievement of the government's vision and mission depends on capable civil servants in the right place.

3.3 Civil Service in Bangladesh

The BCS is structured vertically into four classes, namely class-I, class-II, class-III and class-IV. Based on such variables as levels of responsibility, educational qualification and pay range (Ahmed and Khan, 1990:29). Class-I being the professional or officer class and others performing a variety of supporting functions. All class-I and part of class-II officers are treated as 'gazette' officers, the rest are considered as 'non - gazette' officers (Ahmed, 2002:334). The gazetted officers are normally invested with high powers and responsibilities and consequently enjoy greater privileges than the non gazetted employees.

3.4 Cadre Service

Cadre is the distinct functional sub division of the government bureaucracy. Cadre services are those services, which are constructed under law with a number of positions or structure and recruitment and promotion rules (Morshed, 1997:77). Non cadre services are mostly based on position, with no definite structure of mobility either horizontally or vertically.

A cadre system entails organization of civil servants into semi – functional/ occupational groups. At present there are 28 cadres in BCS. Some cadres are general and some are professional/technical. A very small number of civil servants belong to the cadre service.

4. The Present Recruitment and Selection Process of BCS

BCS has certain practices and policies regarding recruitment and selection which are discussed in this section.

4.1 Method of Recruitment

According to the current recruitment policy, there are three methods of recruitment to the cadre services.

1. Recruitment by direct appointment through open competitive examinations.
2. Appointment by promotion.
3. Appointment by transfer or deputation (Ali, 2007:45).

Only the first of these three methods of recruitment is addressed in this paper. Recruitment at the entry level is done through direct recruitment.

4.2 Conditions of Eligibility for Recruitment

In 1982, elaborate recruitment rules (BCS Recruitment Rules, 1981) were framed for appointment to various cadres of BCS. Today, admission to the different cadres of the BCS is open to candidates at least a bachelor's degree from university of Bangladesh or abroad. The minimum age limit has been set at 21 and the maximum at 30 years. A non citizen or one who is married to a foreigner is debarred from applying for a position in the civil service. A candidate has to specify his/her application form the names of the cadres he/she desires to be considered for in order of preference.

4.3 Recruitment Agencies or Authorities

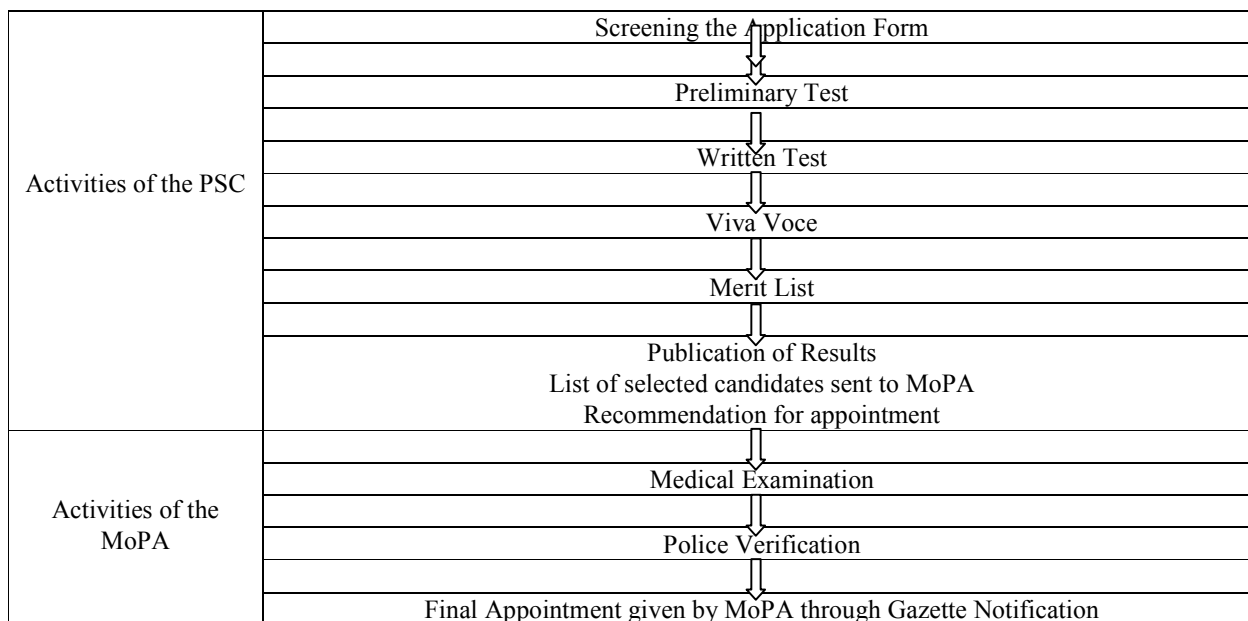
In Bangladesh rules, regulation and instructions concerning recruitment and selection emanate from the Ministry of Public Administration (MoPA), formerly known as Ministry of Establishment. But the task of recruitment is entrusted to the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (BPSC), shortly known as PSC – a constitutional body with defined powers and functions (Article 137 -141 of the constitution).

The constitution has assigned PSC to conduct competitive examinations for the selection of suitable persons for appointment to the cadre posts. Entry level cadre officers are recruited directly by the PSC through an open competitive examination known as BCS examination. BCS examination is seen as the gateway for entry into 28 cadres and other government services of the Republic .Bangladesh largely follows a 'closed entry' system where class-I officers are recruited at entry level. At the mid and upper management levels , 10 percent of the position can be filled through contractual appointments or on deputation from other public sector organization.

The current recruitment system of BCS is that the MoPA gathers staffing requirement from ministries and government bodies to determine the number of vacant posts and then transmits the same to the PSC for administering the recruitment operation. After receiving the requisition, the PSC advertises the number of vacant posts through the newspapers inviting eligible candidates to apply against the available post.

4.4 Selection Process

BCS selection process consists of several steps that are stated below:



After receiving the application forms, the information and documents provided by the candidates are checked. Forms those are incomplete or have errors are rejected in this screening process.

Generally after this initial C.V. screening the eligible candidates are asked to appear at a MCQ preliminary examination of 100 marks to drop out the less qualified candidates. The applicants who qualify preliminary examination are invited to appear at a written test consisting of 900 marks. The distribution of marks in BCS written examination and viva voce are shown in table 1. The candidates obtaining 50 percent marks in written test are qualified for the viva voce of 100 marks. The minimum qualifying marks for viva is 40 percent. The merit list is prepared on the basis of written and viva marks.

After completing merit list, the candidates are selected for different types of quota. The PSC is required to operate a quota system that reserves appointment to class I posts for specified groups.

4.5 Quota System in BCS Recruitment

In the light of clause (3) of Article 29 of the constitution, the government has introduced the quota system (reservation of posts) in case of direct recruitment to BCS, which had undergone change from time to time. Details of the quota system and the subsequent changes made are shown in Table 2.

Table – 2 reveals that, for the recruitment in cadre services, 45 percent of the total available posts would be filled through open competition (merit based recruitment) and the remaining 55 percent would be based on different types of quota (on the basis of equity or positive discrimination). However, quota is distributed among the qualified candidates on the basis of merit in their respective groups.

In BCS the principles of merit and equity both are used in recruitment and selection. Merit entails a process whereby the very best are selected, thereby placing emphasis especially on competitive excellence. Equity implies that, public sector positions are distributed approximately, proportionally to or representative of, the population at large (Zafarullah and Khan, 1989:80). So we can say, BCS recruitment policy is the admixture of merit and quota (Wahhab, 2009:4). The policy makers are trying to maintain a balance between merit and equity in order to make the civil service system more responsible. By calculating the different numbers of quota, the PSC, sends the final list of selected candidates to MoPA. Police verification and medical check-up of the selected candidates is arranged by MoPA, respectively with the support of Home affairs Ministry and Health Ministry (TIB, 2007:34). Final appointment is given by MoPA through notification.

5. Problems in the Existing Recruitment and Selection Process: A critical Analysis

The process has been the centre of criticism for a long time. If recruitment is not fair and competitive, it fails to attract the meritorious and competent candidates. Various Studies suggests that, there are many loopholes in the existing recruitment and selection process for which the civil service is losing its appeal as the best career choice for many competent persons.

5.1 Faulty and Lengthy examination System

The existing procedure of BCS examination is now considered outdated, questionable and time- consuming. The preliminary test was introduced in 1989, mainly to reduce the huge number of candidates for the written examination. The screening method helped reduce the number of total competing candidates by as much as 30 to 40 percent through an objective manner (Ali, 2002:130). But one hour examination of MCQ preliminary test is not enough and proper method to drop out the less qualified candidates. Instead consideration of past academic performance can reduce the number of candidates.

The question papers set for the BCS examination are not rich enough to test the skills and identify the deserving candidates for class-I civil servants. In case of written examination, the papers are basically based on essay type method which offers little opportunity for creative thinking and analytical ability. Most candidates memorize study guides, write the answers mechanically and pass (Jahan, 2006:10). The contemporary examination tools such as question banks, random scrambling of questions on examination papers have never been used.

Another major problem of the BCS examination is that it does not take into consideration the need for specialization of different cadres particularly in relation to general cadres. This frequently results in a mismatch between the skills needed for a job and the candidates selected (IGS, 2008:6).

Largely owing to big number of intakes, the PSC could not act as the watchdog of merit. At present, a huge number of candidates are appearing In BCS examinations which necessitate a large number of examiners. Apart from the quality of examiners this creates inevitable variation in grading (Khan and Ara, 2005:920). Besides, a number of viva boards composed of a variety of interviewers interview the candidate which generally comes up with quite different ratings. The PSC forms multiple viva boards that include PSC chair, members as well as academics and civil servants. These boards have been accused of being a major source of corruption and harassment of the candidates. Certainly questions have been raised in reports about the reliability of the examination marking schemes. Another serious drawback is that, candidates are not provided with mark sheets and they are not allowed to challenge the result for re-examination.

The BCS examination process is also extremely lengthy. According to a study, average time spent for a general BCS examination was 24.75 months and for special 14 months (TIB, 2007: 73).The PSC is blamed for taking too much time from advertisement to final selection. One of the possible negative outcomes of this overlong recruitment process is a loss of good quality candidates to other organizations.

5.2 Reservation of Posts

The recruitment policies in BCS are characterized by reservation of posts based on the principle of representation and special consideration shown to specific groups of people (Table-2). The prevailing system, which is quite complex and based on many factors, has an anti-merit bias.55 percent post reservation for various categories denies meritorious individuals from entering the civil service.

The reservation of posts for freedom fighters wards arise a question as to whether it infringes upon the constitutional right of every citizen to an absence of discrimination on account of birth. It inflicts a further blow on the principle of merit.

As for women quota, it may be said that civil officers are mainly recruited from the graduates of universities. There is no female quota for admission to the universities of Bangladesh. Both male and female students get admission to the universities on merit. A large number of female students are pursuing their studies in the universities and they are doing well. So there is no justification of women quota in civil service recruitment (Wahhab, 2009: 9).

Moreover, quota has always been implemented without transparency. The appointments under quota have never made public either by PSC or by MoPA in official documents, gazette notifications (TIB, 2007: 9). Practically, all researches and analyses of the civil service have recommended a modification of the present quota system.

5.3 Interference of Political Forces and Corruption

The reputation of PSC as an independent body carrying out its duties impartially and with probity has been significantly undermined over a period of several years. It has been blamed that governments in the past have appointed politically aligned persons as chair and members to establish a partisan control over the civil service recruitment process (IGS, 2008:2). As a result, there are allegations of recruiting candidates aligned to the ruling party which has badly affected the quality of BCS. There have been blatant examples of partisan recruitments in important cadres like administration and police (TIB, 2007: 8).

The attempts to politicize the bureaucracy bring back the spoils system (patronage appointment and political favor) in government, damaging the efficiency of civil service. Recruitment based on political connections declines in the standard and quality of human resources in the civil service. It also puts barriers to attracting qualified candidates and reduces their morals.

The leakage of BCS question paper has been happening on regular basis. The PSC had to cancel the 24th BCS preliminary test due to the alleged leakage of question papers. Corruption in viva-voce, discrimination against religious minorities, changing marks and giving extra ordinary marks to the particular candidates, bribe taking by members, officials and staffs

of the PSC are among the serious allegations made against the PSC which have damaged the credibility of the PSC as well as the civil service examination process (TIB, 2007).

Most matters of PSC's organization, administration and finance are subject to the final scrutiny and control of the MoPA. So PSC cannot work independently as hoped.

All these problems have not only created anomalies, contradictions, confusions and deficiencies in the recruitment and selection process of the country but also have helped undermine the people's trust in the recruitment process (Zafarullah and Khan, 1983:132).

‘Successful recruitment and selection depend on an adequate supply of competent or educable workers, an effective information network that reaches the appropriate population of prospective employees, a sufficiently attractive organizational environment to entice the desired job candidates, a clear sense of organizational priorities, and a reliable means of choosing the applicants who are the most highly qualified’ (Hays and Sowa, 2010).

6. Recommendations

To build an efficient civil service the present recruitment and selection process of the civil service needs to be improved and streamlining. The following recommendations can be made on this regard.

- Recruitment should be based on merit rather than quota. The existing quota for freedom fighters, district and women should be abolished as they are no longer considered logical. Only 5 percent tribal quota should continue for a certain period, with the ultimate objective of doing away with all quotas in near future. Meanwhile, opportunities should be extended to them for their advancement.
- The recruitment and selection practice need to be contemporary, time bound and cost effective (UNDP, 2007:29). PSC should move towards modern recruitment, selection and assessment methods. Such assessment can be completed much more quickly than examination based methods. Academic performance can be made a criterion. Because appointment of public officials based on their intellectual ability to perform a job and past accomplishment in academic studies is an almost universal practice.
- PSC can significantly decrease the numbers of less qualified candidates by raising the eligibility criteria for recruitment I.e, educational attainment of at least two first class/ division.
- Past academic attainment may be considered to drop out the less qualified candidates in place of preliminary test. This not only ensures justice, but also speeds up the process of recruitment and minimizes corruption to drop out less qualified candidates (Wahhab, 2009:9).
- The existing generalized examination system should be abolished and cadre specific examination should be introduced to ensure efficiency and professionalism in service.
- Because of lack of transparent assessment criteria for examination, there is scope of irregularities and corruption in the recruitment process. Mark sheets should be given to the examinees and existing restrictions against the re-examination of the scripts should be changed.
- An interview manual could be developed to specify viva-board behavior in dealing with the candidates, types of question that can and cannot be asked.
- Examination scripts should be evaluated by expert and honest examiners.
- High level of honesty on the part of the examination agency staff is required in regard to the BCS examination.
- Confidence and trust in the system must be addressed to attract and retain the best of the corps.
- It is essential that, PSC conducts BCS recruitment in a timely fashion. Due to a long time spent in the selection procedure of PSC prospective candidates engage in private jobs and they are reluctant to sit for BCS examination.
- A transparent process for appointing the chair, members of the PSC should have to be established. The trend of political appointment should have to be stopped. Persons with professional excellence, undisputed integrity, commitment, strong moral courage and personality should be appointed in those posts.
- The government has to ensure that, the PSC can perform its functions without any interference.
- The government can arrange a Civil Service Internship Program to attract brilliant persons to join the BCS .It can give a clear image of the career opportunities in the civil service to the prospective candidates.

7. Conclusion

There are mainly three problems in the recruitment and selection process in the BCS. The first is the quota policy. In developing a recruitment and selection policy for the BCS there has been significant disagreement on the principles of merit and equity. The second is the faulty examination procedure. The third is the politicization and corruption which leads to faulty selection and low quality of civil servants. Political sympathy and partisan activity have badly affected the quality of civil service and undermined the people's trust in the recruitment process. As a result many bright candidates are now less likely to pursue civil service careers and the status of the BCS has eroded. If the recruitment and selection are administratively competent, politically neutral and imbued with the spirit of service we can make the bureaucracy an efficient, dynamic and powerful force for better governance in the country.

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Table 1

Distribution of Marks of BCS Written Examination and Viva Voce

Subject for General Cadres	Marks	Subjects for Professional/Technical cadres	Marks
General Bangla	200	General Bangla	100
General English	200	General English	200
Bangladesh Affairs	200	Bangladesh Affairs	200
International Affairs	100	International Affairs	100
Mathematical Reasoning and Mental Ability	100	Mathematical Reasoning and Mental Ability	100
General Science and Technology	100	Two papers for post related subject	200
Viva	100	Viva	100
Total	1000	Total	1000

Source: <http://www.google.com.bd/>

Table 2

Quota Reservation for direct recruitment in BCS

Categories of Quota	For Class – I Services (Percentage)		
	1972	1976	1985 – till date
Merit (Outside District quota)	20	40	45
Freedom Fighters	30	30	
War affected women	10	10	
District quota	40	20	
a) Children of freedom fighters			30
b) Women			10
c) Tribal			05
d) District Merit for the general candidates of the district			10
Total	100	100	100

Source: Compilation from different Recruitment Policy