

9 September, 2015

Private Universities shaping the future leaders of the nation!

By Suntu Kumar Ghosh

Education is increasingly becoming a bigger necessity in Bangladesh. With our population growing at a voluptuous rate and with the decreasing high school dropout rates, the country's public universities do not seem to be increasing their capacity. Where will the thousands of students graduating HSC and equivalent examinations every year go for higher education? The answer came to us Bangladeshis two decades ago in the form of private universities. Understanding the needs of students and providing quality education has been the major agenda for the private universities. Initially it was hard for them to compete with the public universities of the country and the foreign degrees that many students desired. Creating and sustaining a high standard while running head to head with the major leagues has been a trying journey for the private universities. The education system must stop and acknowledge that the private universities of the country have created a platform for the hundreds and thousands of students who could not make it into the public universities for shortage of capacity. In 2015, a total of 11,41,374 students, comprising of 606,293 male and 535,081 female students, sat for the HSC and its equivalent examinations. A total of 735,673 students came out successful. The highest success rate was recorded in Rajshahi board with 77.54% students passing this year while Jessore board scored the lowest 46.45 %. 74.57 % students of Sylhet board cleared the exam while at Dhaka 68.16 %, Dinajpur 70.43%, Barisal 70.06%, Comilla 59.80% and Chittagong 63.49%. However, the public universities located all over the country cannot even accommodate one-fourth of these students during admissions. The rest are left flustered about where to go. Many refuse to sit for the entrance exam in itself. Coming from an English medium background they are not much of a fighter with the current public university entrance exam question pattern. They opted for the next best option as they do not have the courage to fight 5000 other equally brilliant students for one ticket into the public university. They chose to go to a private university as they could not afford to get a foreign degree like many other students coming from affluent families. With the number of private universities rising every year the students see it as a beacon of hope. The private universities have been providing quality education to its students. The private university sector boomed during a decade when the numbers of HSC graduates were increasing exponentially and the public universities were drowning in an ocean of applicants trying to score a chance to higher education. However, the private universities have tried to accommodate these students who once had no option available to them as the public universities could not increase their capacity. On the other hand, the private universities are increasing their capacity every day. They are moving into bigger campuses and trying to acquire the best faculties they can find. The private universities have given the students a shot at higher education. Even though many argue that they are exorbitantly overpriced, they are at the very

least trying to give us the best quality education that a specific amount of money can buy. At the same time people tend to ignore the fact that the public universities are heavily subsidized for by the government. Moreover, the public university standards of Bangladesh cannot be compared as there are massive differences between the quality of education offered by Dhaka University, which was once considered the Oxford of the East, and the rest of the public universities in the country. The students at the private universities think it to be a wiser choice. They do not have to face any session jams and can graduate in due time, which tends to be an essential tool eventually in the job market. During their entrance exams they know exactly what they want to study and apply for that rather than staying in dilemma about which academic division does the authorities think that they are good enough for and placing them there. Moreover, it is a major decision that is left at the hand of someone who barely knows what students are capable of and this aptitude test is somewhat generalized because for different fields of educations they have one single examination and then they place students according to the results. Some recent situations have shed light on the fact that suggests that the public university entrance exams are not only difficult for the English medium students but even the Bengali medium students are finding it difficult to even barely pass. Apart from the educational dilemmas that the students face, public universities are under heavy political influence. Many of the students are not willing be affiliated with any political parties. They are enrolling in a university for the sake of education and a better future. Private universities offered that to the students. Not only did they offer that but they delivered at a time of need. The number of private universities in Bangladesh stands at 85 today. University Grants Commission (UGC) has created a certain standard which needs to be met before a university is given permission for operating. And even after the initiation the UGC keeps a close eye on the functioning and running of all the private universities. However, public universities do have the charm. They have enormous campuses and the best educators in the country serving their table of knowledge. The private universities may not be deprived but they are definitely the second choices for the educators. And the private universities are dedicated towards hiring the best team to provide the best service to its students. Highly qualified teachers with foreign degrees and attractive experiences are a part of these private universities. They work hard to make the subject matters interactive and realistic and turn the class experience into real life examples. The quality of infrastructure within the campus and amenities provided to the students are commendable and for the money parents devour into this venture of education, students get the state of the art materials and facilities. Education is no more bounded by white boards and markers. The classrooms are well equipped with modern facilities like computer, projector and projector screen so that the impact of knowledge can take a real life interactive shape. Today private universities are overcoming the problem of physical appearance of a student into the class room since they are allowing students to take part in a class sitting in the living room if he or she is ill. In addition the private universities allow their students to find out there course materials i.e. class lectures, course outline, class schedule, exam schedule, vacations and many important things through their web site and it is a big advancement in the era of acquiring knowledge. Private universities focus highly on exposing their students to the current world scenario and trends. They spend on buying access to the world renowned scholarly journals and make them accessible for the students for free. The students are open to such rich materials from the beginning of their undergrad and learn how to use these materials in the academic world. It is acknowledged by these universities that students need to be very dynamic to secure a place in this challenging world. Thus they believe in building a student not only in academics but also with real life experiences. Private universities offer a wide range of opportunities for co-

curricular activities. Students are regularly involved in different club activities of their choice. Sports, debate, cultural activities are highly encouraged. The platforms of national and global competitions are opened by these private universities for the students and they provide support and build the students so that they can compete equally in the global arena. As per the Private University Act, 5% of the total seats to be kept reserved for the poor and the meritorious students. Private universities are giving opportunities to everyone rather than just the children from financially sound families. Private universities offer different kind of waivers so that the meritorious students are not lost due to lack of guidance. Waiver is offered based on criteria like previous merit, regular performance, need based, freedom fighter, siblings, etc. Recently, many private universities offer extra services like career counseling and professional skill development workshops. They have specially assigned teams to guide the students towards choosing the right career path after graduation. They also affiliate with different multinational and national organizations that come directly to the campuses and hire fresh graduates. Thus private universities take responsibility of job placement very efficiently which is seldom seen in the public universities. Private universities nowadays are in affiliation with many foreign universities. Many of them are striving hard to launch imparting MPhil and PhD degrees in collaboration with the reputed foreign universities which would encourage researchers conducting research in his or her country as well as save currency. The students can be highly beneficial for these relationships. They can easily apply there and transfer their credits if they want to change universities. The foreign institutes offer waivers for students with good results. Some private universities also have foreign exchange programs. These programs allow foreign students to acquire education in Bangladesh. There are many reputed private universities that are currently housing over hundred foreign students. These students come here for the quality of education against the price they are paying for it. One cannot say that this is a lost argument. They are both appealing in their own ways. However, given the opportunity many would still chose a public university over a private one. However, the private universities thrive in keeping their students on their toes and running. They are just as dedicated and responsible in shaping the future of the impending leaders of the nation. — The writer is Assistant Professor BRAC Business School, BRAC University, Bangladesh Email suntu_ghosh@yahoo.com