CGS-FES Lecture Series on Higher Education

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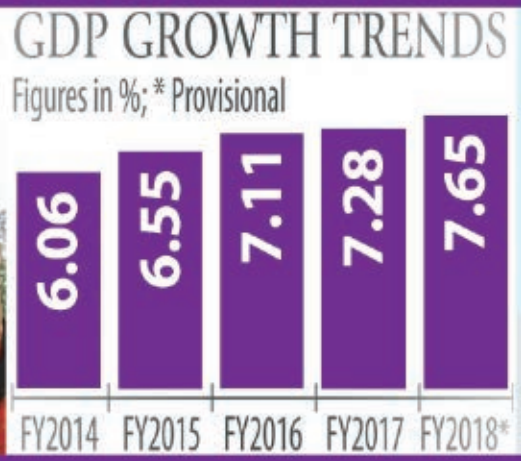
Higher Education for an Emerging Middle Income Country

Sir Fazle Hasan Abed KCMG



May 2018

"Forty-seven years ago, in this month on 7th March, Bangabandhu, the Founding Father, gave a clarion call to launch our struggle for liberation. The struggle continues. Our education system, including the universities and other institutions of higher education, must be part of this struggle and make their contribution."

Sir Fazle Hasan Abed KCMG

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Higher Education for an Emerging Middle Income Country

Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, KCMG

Founder and Chairperson, BRAC

May 2018

From the Director's Desk

This has been quite an eventful journey, but I must quickly add, it is only a beginning! It all began with a flight delay at the Kolkata airport some three and half years back when Mr. Henrik Maihack, the first Resident Representative of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Bangladesh, came out with a simple question in the midst of an hour-long 'idle talk' or *adda*: "Prof, can we do something together?" I responded by saying, "We certainly can! We can actually do many things, but let us take up a task from which many will emerge." And what would that be? "How about a task to reform, reorient, reinvent higher education in Bangladesh?" Henrik agreed instantly. Later when Ms. Franziska Korn replaced Henrik, she pursued it with equal passion and patience. I am also confident that Franziska's successor, Ms. Tina Blohm, will be equally passionate to carry forward what is certainly an enormous task of remaking tertiary education of Bangladesh. I was equally fortunate to get Dr. Iftekhar Iqbal of the Department of History, University of Dhaka, to co-design and co-run this project. I am also thankful to my young colleague Mohammad Atique Rahman for supporting the publishing team. Flight delays need not be frustrating; it can be equally productive!

The timing was perfect. Since few years from now in 2021 the University of Dhaka, the oldest University of the country, and a University that literally gave birth to Bangladesh, will be 100 years old, there is good reason to reflect on the state of higher education in the country. A centenary, however, has other connotations. Indeed, as a Bengali you cannot help being infected by the idea of a centenary. And this is all because of Rabindranath Tagore and his confidence of being remembered for centuries: আজি হতে শত বর্ষ পরে কে তুমি পড়িছ বসি আমার কবিতাখানি কৌতূহল ভরে ("Who are you, reader, reading my poems an hundred years hence?"). Of course, Tagore got infected with the extraordinary question that the Vedic philosopher Maitreyi raised in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad: "What shall I do with that which will not make me immortal?" Immortality aside, Tagore's fondness for Maitreyi's query rested on a deep philosophical understanding of the role bestowed on humans to reproduce life and living, indeed, not

only for itself but for all beings on this planet and beyond, but alas, when considered individually, only for a fixed amount of time. The implication of this philosophical understanding, particularly putting unflinching faith on humans, is enormous. More so when humans are intrinsically aware of the age-old wisdom of *tempus fugit*- time flies!

The triadic formulation of time into past, present, and future, however, has made humans realize that neither with 'past' nor with 'present' one can do much about. In fact, when it comes to the 'past,' humans can revisit, reinterpret, review, retrospect, even re-examine, but cannot change. About the 'present,' also humans cannot do much about; they can either enjoy or suffer from it. Indeed, like the morning dew, no being can ever hold on to the present; one simply has to let it go. It is precisely for this reason that Heidegger, Derrida, and many of the post-structuralists, went on writing 'present' by crossing it. This is because the word 'present' cannot help being *sous rature* – 'under erasure,' it is 'inadequate yet necessary'! 'Future' is the only thing that is in the hands of the humans; the latter can imagine, design, and creatively work to make a difference to it, and that is what drives humans to dream and work relentlessly to materialize the dream. Humans otherwise cannot exist without dreams! And this is precisely what has motivated this project with the goal of reforming, reorienting, reinventing, remaking higher education in Bangladesh, indeed, despite the dismal state it is in.

We are otherwise interested in the 'futures' of higher education and this is what the project tried to convey to all those who got engaged from day one, starting with the volume on the *University of Dhaka: Making Unmaking Remaking* (2016) and a series of workshops on higher education, both public and private, indeed, with different stakeholders. We have already consulted more than 200 people on the state of higher education in Bangladesh, and that is what gives us so much confidence that there are enough knowledge at hand to change things for the better.

I guess this is also for the first time that an Assembly on Higher Education was held with participation of students, faculty, and administrators from both public and private

universities of the country. And nothing could have been more befitting than having Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, a life-long visionary and the founder of one of the largest NGOs in the world, including the founder of a university, come and deliver his vision of higher education in Bangladesh. Sir Abed has laid the ground and ignited our imagination. The task now is to implement and carry the vision forward. Let us keep our dreams alive!

Imtiaz Ahmed
Professor of International Relations &
Director, Centre for Genocide Studies,
University of Dhaka

From the Resident Representative's Desk

Education shapes us in powerful ways. Meeting someone who went to the same university connects you. You may talk about your journeys of absorbing and unveiling knowledge, about the frustrations with an institution that may not have recognized your individual talents. Or you may remember that one professor or co-student who inspired you and pushed your thinking to yet undiscovered grounds.

These inspirations often happen by coincidence - and so it is the coincidence of my predecessor Henrik Maihack and Prof. Imtiaz Ahmed being stuck at the airport that has led us to embark on a journey of creative imagination on what higher education may look like. But as the German sociologist Erich Fromm put it 'Creativity requires the courage to let go of certainties.' Letting go of certainties is something that humans resist viciously, as we often operate on pre-formed images already imprinted in our brains. Hence, the task at hand is to build bridges between what is concretely changeable and implementable in the tomorrow - and what is dreamable and yet undiscovered in the era to come. In this publication, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed has brilliantly built such a bridge. I would like to sincerely thank him for sharing his clear vision of higher education for the emerging Bangladesh as a middle income country. He is surely setting out a path from which many tasks will emerge.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is almost as old as University of Dhaka: it was founded in 1925, owing its mission to the political legacy of its namesake Friedrich Ebert, the first democratically elected German President. Today, FES operates in over 100 countries worldwide - the Bangladesh Office being one of the youngest offices around the globe. The future of education, creative ways to promote civic education and a socially-just system of higher education are themes that shape our thinking and dialogue programs in Germany and many other countries. FES hence feels immensely privileged to be part of a discussion on higher education in Bangladesh.

Tina Blohm
Resident Representatives
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)
Bangladesh Office

About the Author

Born in 1936, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed KCMG, major in Accountancy from the United Kingdom, started his career in the Shell Oil as a senior corporate executive. He was drawn into philanthropic activities, after a cyclone hit Bangladesh in 1970. He returned to Bangladesh as Call for Duty to help the people of his motherland after the devastating 1970 cyclone and 1971 War of Liberation. To find his homeland drowned in poverty, Sir Abed established BRAC to address the needs of the disempowered people and war time refugees in Bangladesh, mainly to support them to develop their own capacity to better manage their lives.

BRAC is now one of the largest NGOs in the world, operating across eleven countries in Africa and Asia. Its primary objectives are to alleviate poverty and empower the disempowered people. BRAC was ranked first by the Geneva-based 'NGO Advisor' in 2017 in terms of impact, innovation and sustainability.

Sir Abed has been honoured with numerous national and international awards for his achievements in leading BRAC, including the Jose Edgardo Campos Collaborative Leadership Award, South Asia Region (2016); Thomas Francis, Jr. Medal in Global Public Health (2016); World Food Prize (2015); Spanish Order of Civil Merit (2014); Leo Tolstoy International Gold Medal (2014); David Rockefeller Bridging Leadership Award (2008); UNDP-Mahbubul Haq Award for Outstanding Contribution to Human Development (2004); Gates Award for Global Health (2004); and many more.

Sir Abed has brought honour to Bangladesh in 2009, when he was appointed as "Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George" by the British Crown in recognition of his services to reducing poverty in Bangladesh and internationally.

In 2014 and again in 2017, he was named in Fortune Magazine's List of the World's 50 Greatest Leaders.

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Higher Education for an Emerging Middle Income Country [1]

I. Introduction

Since its birth as an independent nation in 1971, having been ravaged by war and destruction, Bangladesh has made great progress in achieving high economic growth and poverty reduction. The average rate of GDP growth has exceeded 6 per cent in recent years and the incidence of moderate poverty fell to 25 per cent by 2015. Extreme poverty fell even faster to half of this rate. Bangladesh crossed the World Bank's threshold for lower-middle income in 2015.

Demographic, health and education indicators as well as indicators of gender equity have shown major improvements. Bangladesh is a positive outlier compared with the social progress of countries with similar per capita income. It benefits from the demographic dividend along with greater participation of the female workforce. The long-term development objective is to achieve upper-middle income status and eliminate extreme poverty by FY2031 and cross the threshold for developed countries by 2041. The aim is to accelerate ongoing structural transformation to achieve double digit growth in manufacturing along with further growth of the organized service sector. The rural economy is expected to undergo transformation as more non-farm activities emerge and the spread of ICT increases productivity and efficiency. These objectives and aspirations bring to the fore the importance of developing the skills and capabilities of people, especially those emerging from the higher education system and taking the lead in different spheres of national development.

The country looks towards ambitious targets in line with the global SDG4 goal of "ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning for all" by

[1] Sir Fazle Hasan Abed KCMG presented this Keynote Paper at the "Assembly on Higher Education" on 11 March 2018 at the Nabab Nawab Ali Chowdhury Senate Bhaban, University of Dhaka. The Education Assembly was organized by University of Dhaka in association with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES).

2030. The new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been endorsed by the Government of Bangladesh.

The ten SDG4 targets cover primary to tertiary education, technical and vocational education, skills development of youth and adults, literacy and numeracy of the population, inclusiveness and equity in education, quality of education and teachers, as well as the provision, scope and character of education services that address the targets. Knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour that contribute to sustainable development are given prominence. In contrast to EFA 2015 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), attention is given to a broader range of education issues including tertiary education and the opportunities for lifelong learning for all in a learning society. Substantial re-thinking is clearly required regarding priorities for action in education in the immediate future and the longer term. In this re-direction of priorities and strategies, universities and the entire higher education sub-sector deserve special attention.

II. Higher Education -- A Diverse and Complex System

By 2016 (the year of the latest University Grants Commission report), there were 137 public and private universities of different kinds in Bangladesh with 3.5 million students. We have travelled a long way from just six public universities in 1973 with less than a hundred thousand students, including students in affiliated colleges under those universities.

It is a diverse and complex system. There are 42 public universities officially established, of which 37 are functioning. They enrolled 3,150,409 students in 2016, including students in their affiliated colleges. Excluding the National University, the Open University and the Islamic Arabic University, the enrolment in public universities was 260,084, which is a more meaningful number to compare with that of private universities.

Private universities, the first one opening its doors in 1992, now officially total 95 - although 9 are not operational - with an enrolment of 337,157 students in 2016. The mainstream universities, therefore, had around 600,000 students.

Higher education is more than the customarily known universities, as the total enrolment numbers suggest. The major components of the higher education system as of 2016 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Components of Higher Education in Bangladesh (2016)

Universities	Affiliated Institutions	Students	(Female)
Mainstream Public Universities (34 functioning, with 11 general and 23specialised universities)	319 (Medical/Health technology and others)	264,084 (11.2%) (8.4% excluding affiliated institutions)	(86,294)
National University	3,081 colleges	2,300,053 (73.0%)	(1,064,170)
Open University	--	256,304 (8.1%)	(100,647)
Islamic Arabic University	1,247 madrasas	77,247[1] (2.5%)	(30,899)
Islamic University	--	162, 998[1] (5.2%)	(62,791)
Total Public	**4,647 affiliated institutions**	**3,150,409[2] (100%)**	**(1,393,082)**
Private Universities (86 functioning)	--	337,157	(92,237)
Grand Total	**4,647 affiliated institutions**	**3,487, 566**	**(1,485,319)**

[1] Islamic Arabic University, launched in 2015 as an affiliating university for Madrasas, is in the process of bringing under it institutions formerly under Islamic University.
[2] Number does not add up due to incomplete data for component categories.
Source: UGC, 2017. Report of the University Grants Commission, 2016.

We can see from Table 1 the scope and complexity of higher education:

• Of about 5,000 tertiary-level institutions, only 120 are functioning mainstream universities. Of 3.5 million tertiary-level students, 600,000 are directly in universities. These exclude the Quomi stream religion-based institutions, which have been given recognition by the Government without exercising any regulatory authority and are not included in this discussion.

• University students , public and private , make up 17 per cent of tertiary students. Among them, 7 per cent go to public universities and 10 per cent to private universities.
• 32 per cent of mainstream public university and 27 per cent of private university student bodies are female.

The total higher education system consists of distinct components which have different roles and contributions to make. They complement each other and are inter-dependent. Faculty for all components of higher education generally come from the mainstream universities.

By developing human resources in specialized professional areas, the professional institutions relieve the burden on the mainstream universities, leaving them free to engage in basic and applied research and interdisciplinary areas of higher education. Universities have a special role to play in the creation, evaluation, maintenance and dissemination of knowledge. A relevant question is how closely the university, as a centre for research, knowledge production and dissemination,should be directly tied to the job market when other institutions of higher learning are also involved in this task.

The colleges under the National University are the workhorses of the higher education system. They supply the bulk of mid-level personnel for both the public and the private sector as well as teachers for the K-12 school education system. It can therefore be said that the quality of the National University colleges determines the quality of the large majority of educated human resources in the country and thus affects how efficiently the country functions. That said, evidence indicates that this large segment of the tertiary education system remains particularly weak in its provision of facilities and faculty and in the quality of graduates produced.

The Open University helps to expand the opportunities for higher education in a flexible way, serving the objective of equity and taking pressure off mainstream universities while maintaining acceptable quality. There is potential for making good use of digital technology

and open source educational content freely available to a large body of our learners with the mediation of and necessary language adaptation by the Open University.

It is also essential to look at higher education development as part of the total education system. There are two direct links between higher education and the rest of the system. First, the school system provides and prepares students for higher education. How schools do their job determines what tertiary institutions can do and whether they can succeed. Secondly, tertiary institutions supply the teachers for schools. It is a cyclic relationship but making it a virtuous cycle is a challenge.

In this regard, it has to be recognized that, despite policy statements about turning our people into capable human resources and taking advantage of the demographic dividend, Bangladesh has failed to invest enough in education. The average of around 2 percent of GDP allocated as public resources for educationis one of the lowest in the world, among developing countries and in the region. A UNESCO global monitoring report notes budget allocations of 3.8 percentof GDP in India and 4.1 per cent in Thailand for 2015. (UNESCO, 2017. Global Education Monitoring report 2017/18.)

The low investment in education is also evident in the higher education sub-sector, with inadequate per student spending in the public sector as well as in research and provision for libraries, laboratories, student dormitories and research budgets, as discussed later.

III. Assuring Quality - The Overarching Problem

The concept of quality

We are all concerned about the quality of education or, in our case, the quality of institutions of higher learning. We complain with good reason about the erosion of quality, would like to see things change and be a part of the change process. But it appears to be remarkably difficult to come up with a succinct definition of quality in higher education that we can all agree on. We end up resorting to a discussion of inputs - facilities

teaching faculty, learning materials and content, and students. We talk about how these different elements are brought together in an interactive process by institutional leaders, managers, faculty and students to produce the outcome. The outcome is the transformed learners – more competent, skilled, purposeful, wiser, better equipped to fulfill their own personal goals and help make their community and the world a better place.

We in BRAC University have set goals for ourselves concerning the kind of persons our graduates should be. We want them to possess a few essential attributes.They should have good written and verbal communication skills. They should be able to think critically and apply scientific reasoning in solving problems. They should have skills to look at evidence and undertake basic quantitative analysis. They should be tech-savvy and both use and benefit from digital technology. They should be sensitive to the changing global world. They should accept and respect diversity and the plural identities of human beings which would serve as a moral compass for them. International discourse about 21st century skills such as those advocated by UNESCO and the European Union echo these objectives (Altback, et al,2009; European Parliament, 2006).

We do not claim that we have a formula to ensure achievement of these goals. But they provide us with an agenda and help us define the quality outcome we aspire to. A system thinking looking at the inputs, the process and outcomes can help us get there.

The standards and rules for quality in higher education have been specified in the charters of establishment of the universities and other tertiary institutions, including the University Ordinances of 1973, the Private University Act of 1993 and the amended Act of 2010.

A serious difficulty is the lax application of the provisions of the law. In consequence, despite the expansion of the system, the benefits of the investment are not realised. The expected competencies and capabilities of the graduates are not developed, leading to poor private returns to the individual graduates (and those large numbers who do not graduate), as well as poor social returns for the nation from the investment in higher education.

The composition of the sub-system

One concern is the distribution of students between the disciplines and the relevance of the learning content for the employment market and national development. Given the growing anxiety around the world about youth unemployment, even among higher education graduates (Barber, et al., 2013), the question of relevance is critical.

Table 2. Student Enrolment by Discipline (2016)

Discipline	% ofStudents in 34 Public Universities	% of Students in National University	% of Students in Open University	% of Students in Private Universities
Arts/Humanities	16.1	29.1	86.8[1]	10.0
Social Sciences	14.4	32.4	--	11.0
Science, Agriculture, Technology, Medicine	48.1	9.4	4.2	40.0
Commerce/Business	13.3	28.3	2.0	33.0
Law	2.0	0.6	0.3	--[2]
Education	1.1	--	5.6	--[2]
Pharmacy	--	--	--	3.0
Other Diplomas and Certificates	5.0	0.2	1.2	1.0
Total	**100.0**	**100.00**	**100.0**	**98.0**

Note. Total does not add up to 100 per cent due to incomplete data. Source: UGC, 2016, Tables 2.1.2.4 (p.123) and 2.3.1.2 (p.309).[1] Includes Social Sciences. [2]Included under Social Sciences.

Table 2 shows the distribution of students by discipline in different segments of higher education. Some observations regarding this distribution of students can be made:

- Public and private universities enrol a high percentage of students in science, technology, agriculture and medicine – 48 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. National and Open Universities, which serve over 80 per cent of tertiary students, enrol a small proportion of students in these career-oriented practical subjects – only 9 per cent and 4 per cent respectively.

- Enrolment of National and Open University students in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences is 72 per cent and 86 per cent respectively, compared to enrolment of 30 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively, of mainstream public and private university students in these subjects. One wonders if this should not be the other way around. Presumably, more capable students come to the mainstream universities; they could pursue a liberal education and courses in basic sciences to become leaders in different academic and professional fields and pursue advanced studies.
- Both private universities and the National University appear to be responding to perceived market demand for training in business and commerce, though the quality of training and its credibility in the market vary greatly.
- Teaching as an occupation absorbs a high proportion of tertiary graduates, but there is little opportunity for professional preparation of teachers in the tertiary education system. Universities don't seem to play a significant role here. Only the Open University, according to the data, offers some courses.
- How well the disciplines and learning contents of the Islamic University and the Islamic Arabic University, which enrol almost 8 percent of tertiary education students with public patronage, prepare their graduates for the contemporary society and professions appears to escape discussion and objective analysis.
- The data regarding enrolment by discipline are incomplete and not comparable across institutions. A standard classification of disciplines and subjects could be developed and applied across the system to collect and analyse data for better planning.

Teachers and teacher-student ratio

Among the top 100 Asian Universities within the 600 best universities in the World University Rankings 2016, none has more than nine students for every staff member. This is well below the average 16.5 students per staff member for all 800 universities in the World University Rankings (Times Higher Education Supplement, 2017). Such a gross ratio provides only a rough order of magnitude. An appropriate teacher-student ratio depends on the proportions of faculty with different levels of experience and qualifications and

how they are deployed for teaching, tutorials, research and student counselling. Table 3 provides the numbers for public and private universities in Bangladesh.

Table 3. Teacher-Student Ratio in Public and Private Universities

Category of University	Full-time Teachers	Part-time Teachers	Total	Teacher Student-Ratio
Public Mainstream Universities	13,072	(2,706 on leave)*	10,366 available	1:26
Private Universities	10,463	5, 108	15,671	1:22

Source. UGC, 2017.Report of the University Grants Commission 2016.
*Teaching staff on study leave or absent for other reasons and not available for teaching.

The prevailing teacher-student-ratio is not sufficient to enable university teachers to engage in teaching, outside class advising and interaction with students, and to pursue research and professional development activities The National University gross teacher student ratio is1:23, with about 100,000 teaching personnel teaching 2.3 million students. The gross ratios are subject to the actual availability of personnel and ensuring qualified teaching personnel for each subject. Support for teachers with digital learning resources and preparing them and students to make use of these resources would be one way of optimising teacher productivity.

The number of teachers is not the only issue, of course. Lack of professionalism and skills of teachers is widely regarded as one of the reasons for the low learning achievement of students and graduates not matching market needs. Professional development of university teachers is limited to obtaining an advanced degree in the relevant discipline. They are seldom trained in pedagogical skills and to engage students in active learning. These aspects of the teaching-learning process are overlooked.

Another issue relating to teachers and teaching is the role of the tertiary system in preparingteachers for the school system which, in turn, supplies the students -- the essential inputs -- for the higher education system. We will come back to this issue later.

IV. What Can Be Done?

To bring about the desired changes in the higher education system so it serves the human and socio-economic needs of an emerging middle-income country, a system view must be taken. The key inputs, processes for managing the inputs to produce the outputs and then delivering the outcomes have to be examined and put to effective use.

We examine some key elements of the system and argue for transformative shifts from customary approaches to set in motion the change needed to take us to the destination – 2030 and beyond. We suggest actions and strategies related to pedagogy and teachers, more and better use of funds, expansion strategies, institutional culture and values, and governance to fit the purpose.

Pedagogy and teachers in higher education

Pre-tertiary education does not prepare most students to become independent learners with the discipline, study habits, communication skills and reasoning capabilities expected of higher education students. It is necessary to recognise this reality and start from-where the learners are. Remedial and supportive measures for learners need to be part of pedagogy in every subject in institutions of higher education. The teaching-learning process needs to allow and encourage each student to grow and develop from where he/she is.

The rapidly evolving technology landscape opens new vistas for learning. Universities have to formulate a strategy for the inclusion of technology for teaching and ask: What is best done face-to-face and what online, and in what contexts?

How can they increase their effectiveness and how can technology complement them? (Bates, 2015:251).

- Teachers in universities and other higher education institutions must have the knowledge in their discipline. They also need the knowledge and skills to be effective teachers in order to accompany young learners in their journey to learn and grow. The initiatives taken by universities and the UGC to introduce professional development for their teachersneed to be strengthened and additional resources invested. Every institution of higher learning (IHL) should have an effective professional faculty development centre.

- Open educational resources (OER) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, videos, tests, software, and other means of conveying knowledge. A minority of more tech-savvy and brighter students are already taking advantage of these, which is creating a new digital disparity. A concerted and systematic effort is needed to adapt these materials for the majority of students. The instructors have to be prepared and encouraged to act as intermediaries to help students access the open resources. The Open University should take this on as a major project, while all universities can move towards placing more of their regular courses online for their students.

New thinking about teachers and the role of higher education

Few will disagree that a major obstacle to achieving quality with equity in the education system, as envisaged in the Education Policy 2010, is the professional and personal capabilities and attributes of teachers. A vicious cycle, of teachers with limited capability and poor motivation producing students from primary and secondary schools who are ill-prepared for higher education, is at work. Many, in turn, become low-capability teachers, thus perpetuating the cycle. A way has to be found to break this cycle and attract the "best and the brightest" of young graduates into teaching and retain them in the

profession. Global experience of addressing this challenge suggests possibilities from which we must learn.

Bangladesh does not have a pre-service teacher education programme, unlike many countries, although school teaching is the single largest field of employment for college graduates (Ahmed, 2015).

❒ A national teacher development initiative has to be undertaken to begin to orient and prepare, emotionally and intellectually, bright young people after higher secondary for teaching as a noble and rewarding profession. This will include several key steps:

❒ A pre-service teacher preparation programme should be incorporated into the undergraduate degree programme with education as a subject in one or two Government colleges in every district under the National University. Students will receive a BA or BSc degree, depending on the combination of other subjects taken along with Education as the core subject,in addition to a teaching certificate.

❒ Academic and other quality standards required by the National University and UGC (hardly enforced at present) have to be strictly enforced in selected colleges for this initiative. Financial and personnel provisions must be made for this purpose under a special project.

❒ Establishing a National Teaching Service Corps (NTSC), with attractive remuneration and status, will create a national cadre of teachers who, in a few years' time, will form a nucleus of quality education personnel in our schools and bring about a qualitative change in teaching and learning.

A beneficial fallout of this initiative, if properly implemented, would be to show the way for a qualitative change in the colleges underthe National University.

Values and ethics, institutional culture and teachers' role

An institution of higher learning (IHL) must clearly articulate the personal qualities and attributes students should cultivate. It must also create a conducive environment for abiding by defined values and ethical principles in students' behaviour and conduct with their peers, teachers, and the wider society. Responsibility, honesty, upholding the dignity and rights of all humans, appreciation of diversity and plural identities of people, and practice of democracy should guide social interaction in the academic community.

IHLs need to prepare teachers and encourage them to be role models for students in practising the pedagogic approaches and inculcating the values and ethics befitting an IHL. Teachers should be recruited, oriented, supervised, assessed, and rewarded on the basis of how they discharge their role model responsibility.

- IHLs should create an environment that allows them to live up to their function of encouraging all in the IHL community - students, teachers, administrators and parents - to contribute to building an institutional culture. Codes of conduct for the major groups of actors in IHLs- students, teachers and administrators - should be developed and all groups encouraged to abide by these through a fair and transparent enforcement mechanism.

Research on critical national concerns

A university worth the name must contribute to creating knowledge as well as applying knowledge and technology to address critical national priorities. Examples might include climate impact and promoting the green economy; sustainable production and consumption; turning waste into useful products; alleviating drudgery and hazardous work; human ecology in land and water scarcity; bridging the digital divide, bio-technology and genetics, nano technology, artificial intelligence, robotics and relevant social science research.

The initiatives taken so far in this respect are insufficient and lack strategic cohesion. They are piecemeal efforts by individual teachers. They are still not part of an integrated plan for teaching, research and professional faculty development that encourages and rewards research along with good teaching. There is not enough planning and strategising with stakeholders -- industry, Government and academia – to set priorities and extract the results of research.

❒ A research and development council in each university should work with the private sector to develop and support a research agenda and promote start-ups for linking research to application. The regulatory body for higher education, UGC, needs to take the lead to convene stakeholders, set the agenda and priorities, encourage collaboration and mobilise substantially larger resources for research.

Expansion only with basic quality assurance

The UGC 2016 report informs that the total output of higher education graduates and post-graduateswas 508,946. This is meager for a country of 170 million. Yet, high unemployment is reported among graduates. As noted earlier, there is a mismatch between the disciplines and areas of study of the graduates and market needs. It is not a matter of a direct one-to-one correspondence between jobs and university qualifications, which is not possible to establish andimpractical because of rapid changes in job profiles and skills requirements. The mismatch is linked to the quality of education, the competencies of graduates, and employers' expectations and confidence regarding quality. The job market needs people with basic competencies and generic skills, who are capable of adapting to the changing environments and are willing and able to continue learning. .

We noted above that the quality standards set for institutions are not enforced, especially in respect of academic quality. There appears to be a much stronger emphasis on physical infrastructure development by UGC for the growing sub-system of private universities; and on neither infrastructure nor academic criteria for the large network of colleges under the National University. These issues stem from problems related to both governance and meagre resources .

Out of 42 public and 95 private universities, 5 and 9 respectively are yet to be operational. Yet, at least ten more are reported to be in the pipeline. Meanwhile, 4,100 seats remained vacant at graduate and post-graduate level in public universities in 2017, mostly in the outlying districts. They fail to attract students because they "do not have adequate number of teachers, library, laboratories and dormitories." (New Age, "New, outlying district public universitiesfailing to woo students," 5 March, 2018).

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina spoke of having at least one public or private university in each district – a commendable and appropriate target. The purpose of this expansion will be fulfilled only if the minimum acceptable quality standards for academic work and facilities are ensured.

- Higher education opportunities must expand; an appropriate target would be to at least double enrolment (from 13.4 per cent gross for age group 17-24 years in 2015) in the next 10 years in order to come closer to the ratios of access in the region (India - 23.9 per cent in 2013; Thailand - 52.5 per cent in 2014).But the resources invested may be wasted and frustration generated if minimum standards are not enforced. These have to be ensured by proper planning of the academic programme, providing sufficient resources and applying effective governance (see below). [Enrolment rates from World Data Atlas, http://knoema.com/atlas.]

Higher education financing

Total public education funding has been unacceptably meagre, as noted earlier, and the share allocated to higher education has alsobeen disproportionately low. There appear to be no benchmarks for per student spending to ensure an acceptable standard. UGC reports wide variation in per student spending even for the same types of academic programmesand institutions. At the high end is Bangabandhu Maritime University with Tk 469,608 and Bangabandhu Agricultural University, Mymensingh, with TK 326,779 annual spending per student in 2016. For general public universities, Khulna was at the high end

with Tk 154,888 while Begum Rokeya University and Jagannath University were at the low end with spending of 28,325 and 36,095 respectively. For the National University, per student expenditure for 2016 was reported to be Tk. 1,362,while for the Open University it was Tk. 1,049. It was not clear what cost items were included in this calculation, but it appears to be too low to ensure any quality.

In the case of private universities, no public resources are spent and universities operate on the basis of cost recovery. The average spending per student (not counting infrastructure and capital expenditure) was reported to be Tk. 109,230 in 2016– with great variation between institutions.

Private universities have become a vital part of the higher education system and their role and significance will increase as the demand for higher education grows. Even if the Government is not expected to contribute to running private universities, it can take measures to promote broader and more equitable access of learners to private universities by supporting student loans and providing incentives for relevant research. This kind of support would enhance the 'public good' role of private universities.

- Total public education funding must grow. A reasonable target is 4 to 5 percent of GDP in 5 years, which would be in line with the recommended international benchmark. Public allocation for higher education must increase proportionately to assure acceptable quality in mainstream and specialised universities, the National University institutions (including the special teacher preparation initiative) and the Open University.
- A student loan scheme, especially for private universities, should be introduced by a tripartite arrangement between the banking sector (guided by the State Bank), university and the loan beneficiary student. Public liability would be minimal in the form of some interest subsidy and risk coverage through insurance. The capital and operating cost can be supported by loans or grants from international financial institutions and bilateral donors. A beneficial outcome would be quality criteria that may be applied to participating universities in the loan program, including adherence to non-profit and non-commercial operating principles as required by the private university charters.

Higher education governance – protecting it from mal-politics

The state of disarray in higher education governance – arising in part from non-enforcement of the rules and standards that already exist – must be overcome. The University Grants Commission, proposed to be turned into a Higher Education Commission, needs to build the capacity and clout to enforce standards and rules fairly and transparently, without fear or favour. The system needs to move towards greater autonomy with accountability for individual institutions, as long as they follow the agreed rules of the game. Institutions should be allowed to earn the right to exercise greater autonomy as they demonstrate the capacity to abide by rules and maintain performance standards.

Higher education – for that matter all education – needs to be out of bounds for political interference motivated by short-sighted views and factional or individual interests. A case in point is student organisations sponsored by major political parties, which have become a major disruptive influence on campuses.

In April 2010, when the National Education Policy was about to be announced, five of the most eminent educational leaders of the country – Prof. Kabir Chowdhury, Prof. Zillur Rahman Siddiqi, Prof. Jamal Nazrul Islam, Prof. Anisuzzaman, and Prof. Serajul Islam Chowdhury – in a joint appeal urged political parties to sever their links with their student arms. This appeal is more relevant today than ever (Five Educationists, Press Statement, April, 2010).

A legitimate demand is being raised for the reactivation of student unions in universities to serve as incubators of leadership in society and politics. This will work only if the present vicious student politics can be brought under control.

Mal-politics – or inappropriate influence of political parties, culture and personalities – has engulfed many aspects of education management and decision-making. This is glaringly evident in the universities.

It begins with the process of approving and establishing public and private universities and colleges – based on political lobbying rather than the rational application of criteria. New institutions have sprung up where they are not needed.

It embarrasses me to recite the litany of problems that have been listed in the news media and research reports. It is long and painful – the wrong side of student politics leading to many kinds of crimes that would be credit to a mafia godfather. The pernicious influence spreads to dormitories, campus life, admission of students, question leaks, tenders and contracts for university business, safety of female students, and even the appointment of staff and teaching personnel.

There is a glorious history of students' involvement in national politics, especially during the state language movement and in the 1960s and 1970s when students showed the way to political leaders at critical moments. As a general rule, students were more concerned with their extra-curricular campus activities conducted through the elected student union. For almost three decades,there has been no student union election in any institution of higher education because student politics have been completely taken over by the major political parties and student bodies have lost their independent existence. Unless this situation changes, the election of student unions, now ordered by the high court, is not likely to bring a positive outcome. It is in this context that the five most distinguished educationists of the country felt it was necessary to cut the umbilical cord of student organisations to their political parents. A researcher summarized the miss-governance scenario in public universities as follows:

- Major irregularities, extreme partisanship, severe academic disorder, administrative mismanagement, and academic, administrative and financial corruption have engulfed Bangladesh's public universities. The role of the UGC in supervising universities has become so negligible that it cannot exert any influence against this corruption (Akhter, 2016).

Private universities have not remained immune to the influence of mal-politics. "No rules left to be broken," a headline in a news report about private universities, indicates at least a perception of the problems they face (Wasim, B.H. Daily Star, 2 August, 2014). A Transparency International Bangladesh study in 2014 published a report about how a circle of officials from the Ministry of Education, UGC, and a private university engaged in blatant corruption including selling fake diplomas. The shocking report gained no friends for TIB; rather, much of the private university community and the Ministry of Education opted to "shoot" the messenger of the bad news.

- The governance problems in higher education are rooted in the political culture of the country and the desire of politicians to control and influence regardless of the effects on the education system. Only a political decision at the highest level, as suggested by the distinguished educationists, can help reverse the situation.

- Members of Parliament should voluntarily abdicate the honour of taking over chairs of management boards of educational institutions and should resist placing their proxies in suchbodies. They should support the election or selection of respected educa tionists or respected parents of students in these positions.

- The 1973 University Ordinances and the 2010 Private University Act may be reviewed to ascertain where modifications may be needed inthe present context and to meet future challenges. Most important, however, is the need for restraint by the political power structure in exercising control over the education system from a partisan angle.

- A key element of political restraint would be to reorganize the UGC as the Higher Education Council with enhanced authority and professional capacity so it can play its role in guiding the development of higher education in the larger national interest without a wide-rangingcontrol from the Ministry of Education.

❒ The National University should be decentralised to divisional level with appropriate professional capacity and authority,a plan that was considered at one time but shelved without much explanation. The regional structures can become independent affiliating universities, which is well justified in view of the large numbers and diverse institutions and the significant enrolment that each region would still have.

No nation has reached "developed country" status without building a decent higher education system including some top-notch institutions which could be described as "world class." We have a long way to go.

Forty-seven years ago, in this month on 7th March, Bangabandhu, the Founding Father, gave a clarion call to launch our struggle for liberation. The struggle continues. Our education system, including the universities and other institutions of higher education, must be part of this struggle and make their contribution.

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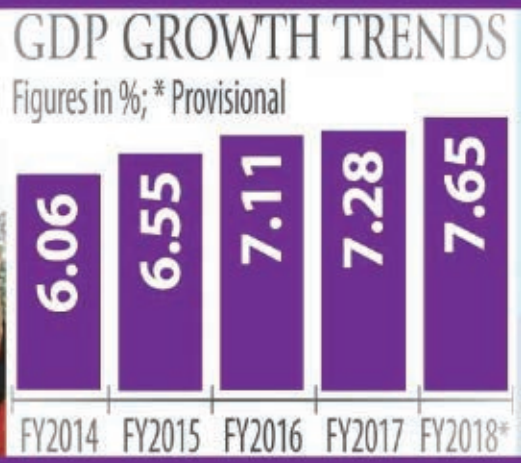

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