



Enhancing Higher Education Quality in Bangladesh: Insights from Stakeholders

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ABSTRACT

The prime objective of this research paper is to dive into the stakeholders' perspectives to gain insights and comprehend their understanding of ensuring the quality of education in the higher educational institutions in Bangladesh. This study employs an interpretive paradigm, inductive reasoning, and qualitative approach adopting in-depth interviews with 30 teachers, students, and staff of 8 public universities in Bangladesh using a purposive sampling technique. This study finds that pedagogical practices, curriculum design, academic atmosphere, academic resources, facilities, infrastructure, considerable outcomes, community impact, and empowerment all require urgently needed comprehensive improvements to the quality of higher education in Bangladesh. This study significantly contributes to ensuring the quality of higher education in Bangladesh. This paper provides policymakers, educational institutions, and stakeholders with a roadmap for bringing about a positive change in the quality of the educational system in Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

Higher education is the cornerstone that shapes individuals, boosts economic development, fosters technological advancement and innovation, and enables social empowerment. Quality in higher education ensures the effectiveness of the educational experience and the outcome [1]. To ensure the quality of higher education, it is important to understand the various perspectives of stakeholders who are directly involved with higher education. In today's highly competitive higher education landscape, quality assurance has become critical for institutions seeking to maintain a strong competitive position and ensure stakeholder accountability [2]. However, it is important to note that quality assurance should not be viewed as a one-time event, such as evaluation, accreditation, ranking, or

benchmarking. Rather, it should be an integrated and ongoing process that is tailored to meet the specific needs of each institution. This approach ensures that the quality of education is continuously monitored and improved, resulting in a better educational experience for students and greater confidence from stakeholders in the institution's ability to deliver quality education [3], [4].

Ensuring quality is more important than cost, thus it is important to have an adequate budget and proper utilization of those resources [5]. Both Bangladeshi degrees and Bangladeshi students are often underappreciated in the global market. It is also a concern that none of Bangladeshi public universities are in the top 900 ranked universities in the world [6]. There is a need to distinguish between real education and

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phony credentials in the context of the rise of so-called "degree mills," or fake universities offering "fake degrees" on the internet. Quality assurance contributes to higher education's transparency and reliability for stakeholders inside and outside the country. Even while higher education is being emphasized more as an engine for personal and societal advancement, questions about the quality of education still surround many institutions in Bangladesh. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition that higher education needs to be more responsive to the needs of students and employers, and that there is a need to focus on developing students' competencies and skills to meet the demands of the job market. One way to understand the current situation of quality in higher education is through the lens of stakeholders which is scholarly limited. Now it needs to investigate the scholarly answer to the questions of what are the stakeholders' thoughts about the quality of higher education in Bangladesh and how to ensure the quality of higher education in Bangladesh. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the stakeholders' thoughts about the quality of higher education in Bangladesh and the ways to ensure the quality of higher education in Bangladesh.

2. Literature Review

Concerns have been expressed about the high quality of higher education in both academic and public areas. As access to higher education has increased globally, it is more important than ever to make sure that educational institutions uphold good standards. This literature review seeks to conduct a critical evaluation of the body of available research and investigate the various aspects of quality, the difficulties institutions encounter, and the outcomes for students and society as a whole. Teachers can design the perfect learning environment that fits the needs and preferences of their students by carefully studying the relationship between pedagogical tactics and curriculum objectives. Education has undergone a paradigm shift from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered approach [7]. Although many institutions advertise that their curriculum is outcome-based, it's critical to realize that need-based curricula are frequently more effective in many instances [8]. To achieve this, learning opportunities must be tailored to the particular needs, interests, and goals of each student.

Teachers can inspire students' inherent curiosity, promote personal growth, and aid in their deeper understanding of the content by placing them at the centre of the learning process [9]. The realms of academics and real-world application ought to be connected by education [10]. When learning is framed in the context of a student's professional goals, they feel as though their learning has a purpose and is relevant.

By taking a more comprehensive approach to education, project-based learning, interdisciplinary research, and the inclusion of real-world experiences are made possible. We can build a dynamic learning environment that promotes creativity, problem-solving, and holistic development by pushing the bounds of the conventional curriculum [11]. Students must actively participate in the learning process to do this. They should be encouraged to actively participate in their education rather than just receive information passively. This can be done in a variety of ways, including through interactive conversations, practical exercises, group projects, and opportunities for experiential learning.

The fundamental tenet of faculty excellence is the practice of standard quality from the teachers, which encompasses a range of elements that influence the general standard of instruction. Making sure instructors are competent in their subjects and stay up to date with new information and trends is a crucial aspect of successful practice [12], [13]. By actively seeking feedback through surveys, public forums, or anonymous feedback channels, faculty members can better understand students' needs and perspectives. By incorporating student input, instructors can alter their pedagogical approaches, improve their communication abilities, and enrich the learning environment [14]. By actively seeking feedback through surveys, public forums, or anonymous feedback channels, faculty members can better understand students' needs and perspectives. By incorporating student input, instructors can alter their pedagogical approaches, improve their communication abilities, and enrich the learning environment [14].

Higher education encourages personal growth. It enables a person to move through life and aids in broadening their intellectual boundaries and worldview [15]. They set out on an exploration of their passions, interests, and values as part of a journey of self-discovery. Additionally, they encounter a range of ideas and civilizations, which broadens their perspective on the world. In universities, knowledge is developed, scrutinized, put to the test, verified, or rejected before being disseminated to the rest of the world [16]. Bangladesh has been acknowledged as one of the top exporters of labour for many years. Labour, employees and even skilled professionals are leaving the country and sending valuable remittances back into the economy [17]. The biggest contribution to skilling up the workforce is higher education.

3. Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this research, this study employed an interpretive paradigm, inductive reasoning, and qualitative approach adopting in-depth interviews to

look into ways to develop quality assurance at Bangladeshi universities. The researchers have conducted 30 face-to-face in-depth interviews using open-ended questionnaires on various stakeholders from 8 Universities in Bangladesh. To be specific, this study took 1 in-depth interview of a former vice-chancellor, 6

IQAC directors, 4 deans of faculties, 5 chairmen of departments, 6 teachers from various higher education institutions, 4 administrative staff, and 6 undergraduate and postgraduate students using a convenience sampling technique. The following table 1 shows the profiles of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

No.	Respondent Code	Gender	Age	Designation	Institution	Education	Experience	Interview Date
1	FVC1	M	58	Professor	KU	PhD	30	09.04.23; 4 PM
2	IQAC1	M	52	Professor	JnU	PhD	33	17.03.23; 10 PM
3	IQAC2	M	50	Professor	RU	PhD	24	19.03.23; 2 PM
4	IQAC3	M	47	Professor	SUST	PhD	19	22.03.23; 10 PM
5	IQAC4	M	53	Professor	KU	PhD	21	25.03.23; 10 AM
6	IQAC5	M	45	Professor	RU	PhD	20	25.03.23; 2 PM
7	IQAC6	M	56	Professor	RU	PhD	35	16.03.23; 10 AM
8	D1	M	57	Professor	RU	PhD	28	14.05.23; 2 PM
9	D2	M	48	Professor	RU	PhD	24	15.05.23; 2 PM
10	D3	M	57	Professor	HSTU	MBA; PGD	24	11.03.23; 3 PM
11	D4	M	52	Professor	RU	PhD	25	16.05.23; 3 PM
12	CH1	M	53	Professor	RU	PhD	26	28.03.23; 5 PM
13	CH2	M	54	Professor	RU	PhD	24	11.03.23; 12 PM
14	CH3	M	52	Professor	RU	PhD	33	14.05.23; 3 PM
15	T1	M	51	Professor	JU	PhD	23	17.03.23; 9 PM
16	T2	M	55	Professor	RU	PhD	32	18.03.23; 10 PM
17	T3	F	48	Professor	RU	PhD	28	10.03.23; 4 PM
18	T4	M	55	Professor	CU	PhD	37	15.03.23; 10 PM
19	T5	F	47	Professor	DU	PhD	28	15.03.23; 8 PM
20	T6	M	48	Professor	RU	PhD	30	23.03.23; 4PM
21	SF1	M	58	Register	RU	MA	45	07.05.23; 12 PM
22	SF2	M	55	Deputy Register	RU	MA	26	07.05.23; 2 PM
23	SF3	F	42	Section Officer	RU	MSS	18	08.05.23; 10 AM
24	SF4	M	45	Section Officer	RU	MA	17	08.05.23;

								12 PM
25	ST1	M	25	MBA Student	RU	MBA	6	08.05.23; 3 PM
26	ST2	F	24	BBA Student	RU	BBA	4	08.05.23; 5 PM
27	ST3	F	25	MA Student	RU	MA	6	09.05.23; 10 AM
28	ST4	M	24	BSc Student	RU	BSc	5	09.05.23; 11 AM
29	ST5	F	26	MSc Student	RU	MSc	6	09.05.23; 2 PM
30	ST6	M	25	MSS Student	RU	MSS	6	09.05.23; 4 PM

Note: FVC: Former Vice-Chancellor; IQAC: Institute of Quality Assurance Cell; D: Dean; CH: Chairman; T: Teacher; SF: Staff; ST: Student

Before conducting any interviews, the respondents were informed of the interview procedures, and with their permission, the researchers began to use the voice recorder on a mobile phone to record the entire interview session. Where voice recording was not permitted, note-taking had to be used. Each face-to-face interview session lasted 35 to 45 minutes. As soon as the interviews were over, the researchers got to work listening to the voice recording and transcribing the raw audio data. To complete all the interviews' transcriptions is a time-consuming and exhausting task. The initial interview data was meticulously segmented into individual words or phrases. The coded data is then categorized and divided into subcategories based on their traits. Later, various categories are created by grouping the subcategories. All the categories are used to generate the study's themes.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis of the Themes

The findings of this study have been summarized by the themes listed in Table 2 where five distinct themes connected to Bangladesh's higher education quality assurance were discovered. It examines the various facets of quality assurance and seeks to cast light on the initiatives, plans, and best practices needed to guarantee the delivery of high-quality education and satisfy the demands and expectations of students, employers, and society.

Table 2: Emerged Themes

No.	Emergед Themes
Theme 1	Pedagogical Practices and Curriculum Design
Theme 2	Faculty Excellence and Effective Governance
Theme 3	Academic Atmosphere, Research, and Industry Needs

Theme 4	Academic Resources, Facilities, and Infrastructure
Theme 5	Outcome, Community Impact, and Empowerment

Theme 1: Pedagogical Practices and Curriculum Design (4100+ words)

A paradigm shift from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred approach has occurred in education. One of the very first respondents of this study, IQAC6 mentioned the paradigm shift in education. He opined that

“Education has undergone a paradigm shift from teaching-centred to learning-centred. To adapt to this change, a shift in mind-set is necessary, although it may take time.”

Respondent Code: T2, Gender: M, Age: 55, Designation: Professor, Institution: RU, Education: PhD, Experience: 32, Date and Time: 18.03.23; 10 PM

By putting students at the centre of the learning process, teachers may foster their natural curiosity, encourage personal development, and help them absorb the material more thoroughly [9]. The Respondent T2 also mentioned,

“Student needs should be prioritized, and their active engagement is crucial for achieving learning outcomes. Creating curiosity and fostering student motivation are essential factors.”

Respondent Code: T2, Gender: M, Age: 55, Designation: Professor, Institution: RU, Education: PhD, Experience: 32, Date and Time: 18.03.23; 10 PM

Respondent Code: IQAC1, Gender: M, Age: 52, Designation: Professor, Institution: JnU, Education: PhD, Experience: 33, Date and Time: 17.03.23; 10 PM

“There is no such compulsion in the quality assurance that the curriculum must be as same as the other universities. But, what's important is that the contents or the activities of the curriculum are need-based.”

Respondent Code: T6, Gender: M, Age: 48, Designation: Professor, Institution: RU, Education: Ph.D., Experience: 30, Date and Time: 23.03.23; 4 PM

“Officially we have a few industry partners in our curriculum committee, and it is important to have them around since we can learn so much from them about the current patterns of the industry and its demands.”

Respondent Code: T2, Gender: M, Age: 55, Designation: Professor, Institution: RU, Education: PhD, Experience: 32, Date and Time: 18.03.23; 10 PM

“The BNQF’s curriculum committee also includes industry partners, employees, alumni, and other stakeholders.”

Respondent Code: IQAC2, Gender: M, Age: 50, Designation: Professor, Institution: RU, Education: PhD, Experience: 24, Date and Time: 19.03.23; 2 PM

Theme 2: Faculty Excellence and Effective Governance

The practice of standard quality from the teachers is the basic cornerstone of faculty excellence, which includes a variety of factors that affect the overall quality of education [18]. Respondent IQAC6 has mentioned,

“Quality practice of teachers is a must to assure quality in Higher Education. This includes the teachers performing their tasks with diligence and utmost care. And apart from that, they are actively trying to change and innovate their knowledge and teaching style.”

Respondent Code: IQAC6, Gender: M, Age: 56, Designation: Professor, Institution: RU, Education: PhD, Experience: 35, Date and Time: 16.03.23; 10 AM

Respondent Code: SF1, Gender: M, Age: 58, Designation: Register, Institution: RU, Education: MA, Experience: 35, Date and Time: 07.05.23; 12 PM

Respondent Code: SF2, Gender: M, Age: 55, Designation: Professor, Institution: RU, Education: MA, Experience: 26, Date and Time: 07.05.23; 2 PM

“Complex governance structures in universities often prioritize influential individuals over qualified candidates. Insufficient funding compounds the problem, exacerbated by corruption and mismanagement of available resources.”

Respondent Code: D4, Gender: M, Age: 52, Designation: Professor, Institution: RU, Education: PhD, Experience: 32, Date and Time: 16.05.23; 3 PM

“Public universities often fail to uphold the intended chain of accountability within their autonomous structures. The responsibilities of department

chairpersons and deans, as outlined on paper, are not consistently upheld in practice.”

Respondent Code: IQAC5, Gender: M, Age: 45, Designation: Professor, Institution: RU, Education: PhD, Experience: 20, Date and Time: 25.03.23; 2 PM

Accreditation on a national and international level enhances credibility and legitimacy [19]. Respondent IQAC6 and IQAC 1 shared,

“In Bangladesh BAC accredit programs and degrees. To be accredited is to mean having all the standards that are required to compare that degree to any other same degree from any part of the world.”

Respondent Code: IQAC6, Gender: M, Age: 56, Designation: Professor, Institution: RU, Education: PhD, Experience: 35, Date and Time: 16.03.23; 10 AM

“Seeking recognition from international authorities is a valuable step to ensure adherence to international standards, in addition to accreditation from national bodies.”

Respondent Code: IQAC1, Gender: M, Age: 52, Designation: Professor, Institution: JnU, Education: PhD, Experience: 33, Date and Time: 17.03.23; 10 PM

Theme 3: Academic Atmosphere, Research, and Industry Needs

Respondents T4 and IQAC1 highlight a gap between university-based research and market demands in Bangladesh. The business relevance of professors’ research is limited, leading to low industry confidence.

“Whatever research we publish in isolation from the industry, this research doesn’t satisfy any need, want, or requirements of the industry.”

Respondent Code: T4, Gender: M, Age: 55, Designation: Professor, Institution: CU, Education: PhD, Experience: 37, Date and Time: 15.03.23; 10 PM

Furthermore, respondent T4 highlights that teacher in Bangladeshi public universities often fails to integrate their research findings into their teaching, hindering the development of up-to-date and relevant curricula

Respondent Code: T4, Gender: M, Age: 55, Designation: Professor, Institution: CU, Education: PhD, Experience: 37, Date and Time: 15.03.23; 10 PM

“Government should incentivize research that is applicable, sellable, and usable in the industry by assigning higher value or percentage weightage to such research.”

Respondent Code: IQAC1, Gender: M, Age: 52, Designation: Professor, Institution: JnU, Education: PhD, Experience: 33, Date and Time: 17.03.23; 10 PM

“Collaboration between academia and industry is lacking due to a lack of mutual interest and engagement.”

Respondent Code: IQAC1, Gender: M, Age: 52, Designation: Professor, Institution: JnU, Education: PhD, Experience: 33, Date and Time: 17.03.23; 10 PM

“There are MOUs in paper. The process of collaboration is almost non-existent.”

Respondent Code: T4, Gender: M, Age: 55, Designation: Professor, Institution: CU, Education: PhD, Experience: 37, Date and Time: 15.03.23; 10 PM

“To encourage industry collaboration, universities need to establish management processes that offer mutual benefits for both parties.”

Respondent Code: IQAC1, Gender: M, Age: 52, Designation: Professor, Institution: JnU, Education: PhD, Experience: 33, Date and Time: 17.03.23; 10 PM

Theme 4: Academic Resources, Facilities, and Infrastructure

Many Bangladeshi universities lack proper academic facilities, libraries, labs, and support systems, according to respondents T1, T4, and D4.

“Our universities lack dedicated research cells for departments, resulting in incoherent and inconsistent research practices due to resource constraints.”

Respondent Code: T1, Gender: M, Age: 51, Designation: Professor, Institution: JU, Education: PhD, Experience: 23, Date and Time: 17.03.23; 9 PM

Respondent Code: T4, Gender: M, Age: 55, Designation: Professor, Institution: CU, Education: PhD, Experience: 37, Date and Time: 15.03.23; 10 PM

The dearth of student counselling and support services at Bangladeshi universities is highlighted by respondents T2, IQAC3, and FVC. They highlight the value of individualized instruction and support small class sizes

“Teachers need to pay more attention to students' psychological and academic needs, which is currently lacking.”

Respondent Code: FVC, Gender: M, Age: 58, Designation: Professor, Institution: KU, Education: PhD, Experience: 30, Date and Time: 09.04.23; 4 PM

Theme 5: Outcome, Community Impact and Empowerment

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According to respondents T4 and T6, Bangladeshi universities rely on foreign ideologies and teach conventionally, lacking the creation and transfer of their knowledge

“Insufficient integration of research and teaching in universities hinders the transfer of knowledge from teachers to students in Bangladesh.”

Respondent Code: T4, Gender: M, Age: 55, Designation: Professor, Institution: CU, Education: PhD, Experience: 37, Date and Time: 15.03.23; 10 PM

“Educators aim to make contributions to their field through research, inviting criticism and making corrections when necessary, while also fulfilling their role as teachers.”

Respondent Code: T6, Gender: M, Age: 48, Designation: Professor, Institution: RU, Education: PhD, Experience: 30, Date and Time: 23.03.23; 4 PM

Respondents IQAC2 and IQAC3 stress the importance of institutions matching their curricula to business needs and making sure graduates are prepared for employment.

“Producing valuable and in-demand graduates should be a priority for universities, similar to how businesses aim to create products with market value.”

Respondent Code: IQAC3, Gender: M, Age: 47, Designation: Professor, Institution: SUST, Education: PhD, Experience: 19, Date and Time: 22.03.23; 10 PM

5. Findings and Discussion

Pedagogical practices and curriculum design are one of the first themes to emerge. Respondents have discussed the paradigm shift that occurred when learning replaced teaching and advocating for need and outcome-based curricula tied to student-centred approaches. Respondents believe education must also create a link between theories and practices [10]. The curriculum should transcend preconceived notions. The curriculum must be structured so that students actively participate in the learning process [20]. Respondents believe teaching is a two-way process that involves both teachers and students. It is necessary to introduce a more difficult curriculum that is heavily centred on problem-solving [21]. This theme demonstrates the value of guest lecturers, professionals with expertise will contribute knowledge, current and pertinent ideas, and a real-world viewpoint [22]. The inclusion of industry partners in the curriculum committee is important [23]. Respondents share universities have alumni on their curriculum committees, but they don't always show up.

Faculty excellence relies on maintaining standard quality [24]. Respondents suggest changing student

assessment methods in Bangladeshi universities, such as using rubrics [8]. Modifying teaching methods based on student feedback is also recommended [14]. Well-designed exam questions can foster faculty excellence and critical thinking among students [25]. Optimal class sizes are desired to enhance the learning environment and enable personalized attention [26], [27]. Comprehensive foundational education is important for effective teaching and ethical boundaries [28]. Transparent selection processes aid in hiring the best instructors [29]. Co-curricular and extracurricular activities of students influence faculty quality [30]. Insufficient lab equipment and qualified lecturers hinder excellence in Bangladeshi universities. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are useful for assessing teacher performance [31]. Effective governance is essential for university success [32], but political influence and complex governance systems pose challenges in Bangladeshi universities. Respondents propose integrating the IQAC and BNQF concepts to ensure excellence at institutional and national levels. Seeking accreditation from domestic and foreign bodies is crucial for acknowledging educational calibre [19].

Academic research, facilities, and infrastructures are crucial for supporting quality, research, and innovation [31]. Respondents think there is a need for research clusters, department-specific research, and innovation cells, fully stocked libraries, and international journal subscriptions, labs and science laboratories, state-of-the-art academic buildings, and equipment. They think we lack all of the aforementioned traits, and they blame inadequate funds, mismanagement, and unscrupulous financial methods. They talked about the limited research budgets and the financial hardships new teachers face hoping to earn a Ph.D. from a foreign university. They go on to say that in Bangladeshi universities student counselling is practically non-existent.

An individual can equip themselves with life skills through higher education [33]. It is a voyage of introspection and enrichment of the self [34]. Higher education has benefits for both the individual and society as a whole [35]. It is the spectrum where new things are constantly created, not only the place where information is taught and transferred [36]. However, respondents express concerns about the lack of a knowledge-creation culture in Bangladeshi institutions. A university's graduates must be competent, skilled, and well-prepared for the real world [37]. Labor, workers, and even skilled personnel are going abroad and sending precious remittances back into the country's economy [38]. But respondents think, that with education, we could add more value to our manpower. Research and innovation enhance the value of already available goods [39]. Respondents think Bangladesh could use field

research on already existing use them for add value to already existing products.

6. Implications, Limitations, and Future Research Guidelines

This research project will provide some insight into the stakeholders' viewpoint, and policymakers will learn what the stakeholders need and think about ensuring higher education. In addition, this research will significantly contribute to the existing literature since studies related to higher education's quality assurance are relatively scanty, especially in the context of the universities in Bangladesh. This research will also introduce new methods leveraging technology and intractable exchanges among the stakeholders, encouraging internationalization, fostering collaboration with industry, and building a culture of continuous learning. This paper will provide insights for policymakers, educators, and the government about assuring the quality of higher education. The results of this study can also help shape conversations on the future course of educational policies and practices as well as the larger conversation on quality assurance in higher education. Educational institutions can better meet the expectations of students, employers, and society at large by understanding stakeholders' demands and integrating them with quality assurance procedures.

7. Limitations

This study involved a small sample size and focused on specific individuals. While this approach allowed for in-depth exploration and understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences, it will not capture the full range of perspectives or provide a comprehensive representation of the quality of higher education across different contexts or populations. To acquire a deeper understanding of the quality of higher education, it is crucial to be aware of these limitations and to supplement qualitative research with quantitative research or mixed-methods techniques. Researchers can provide a more thorough and nuanced assessment of the elements impacting quality by fusing qualitative insights with more extensive quantitative data. They can also spot patterns or trends that go beyond the confines of the qualitative study's particular environment.

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Credit Authorship Contributions Statement:

Shoaib Islam and Monjurul Hassan: Developed the idea of the paper, took the lead in writing the manuscript, conducted the survey, and contributed to data coding and analysis.

Jannat Ara Shewly, Joy Barua, and Md. Shawan Uddin: Conducted the data collection provided critical

feedback and helped shape the research, analysis, and manuscript.

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