QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA: AN OVERVIEW

Md. Rahmat Ullah¹ & Abdul Basir²

¹Faculty of Law and Director Quality Assurance Cell, University of Dhaka
Institutional Quality Assurance Cell-University of Dhaka (IQAC-DU),
Bangladesh
e-mail: rahmat.law@du.ac.bd

²Department of Islamic History and Culture and Director Centre for Advanced Research in Arts and Social Sciences (CARASS), University of Dhaka, Bangladesh
email:basir1965@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

University of Dhaka, Bangladesh was established in 1921. At the eve of centenary, the quality of education and standard of teaching-learning, research and extension, graduates’ capability to get into the job market were the questions of a survey conducted by a self-assessment method in 73 Entity. After the survey, entities were prepared in reports measuring Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT). The reports were evaluated by team of external peer reviewers. The suggestions were: to promote a continuous process of evaluation through self-assessment and monitoring to improve the quality of education, research and governance, review of existing academic programs, policies and practices; websites to be updated; teachers evaluation form and academic curriculum needed to be formulated. The self-assessment process was done through questionnaire survey. The respondents were faculty members, non-academic staffs, students, alumni and employers. After the SWOT analysis, a post self-assessment improvement plan was prepared to overcome the challenges. To ensure quality education in the University of Dhaka, employability and entrepreneurship, pursuit of knowledge to meet the local and global needs require setting up the mission, vision, website updating, curriculum introduction, teachers’ evaluation, formation alumni association and collaboration. To materialize all these adequate funding are required for development in the University of Dhaka.

Keywords: Quality Assurance; University of Dhaka; Self-Assessment; SWOT, PSAIP

INTRODUCTION

In the age of globalization, the integration process in every sector is faster than ever. Higher education is not an exception to that. Today without quality education, integration into global market is a big challenge. So, it is very
important for the educational institutions to know how they are doing and what they can do even better to meet the needs of the stakeholders. The self-assessment exercise is an effective approach to get a clear picture of the current situation by an informative Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis. Thus self-assessment becomes one of the core activities of credible quality assurance analysis.

As the premier and leading academia, the University of Dhaka of Bangladesh was established in 1921 [1]. It has 13 faculties with eighty-four departments and twelve institutes with more than 59 research centers including affiliated and constituent colleges. It has been awarding degrees of Bachelor, Master, M.Phil. and Ph.D. [2]. Every year thousands of graduates from this university enter into the profession at home and abroad. However, the questions are whether the provision of education are job market-oriented and meet necessities of the market; what quality education is being provided and how effective the existing teaching-learning method are. In addition, whether there are any gaps and inadequacies and how to overcome or improve. These have never been assessed previously. To find the answers to these questions, a Self-Assessment Program was undertaken under the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP) initiated by the joint venture of the World Bank, Ministry of Education (MoE) and the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh [3]. The tenure of the project was three years which ended in 2018. This assessment was confined within seventy-three departments and Institutions out of eighty-four departments and twelve institutes whose graduates are ready in the job markets. After the successful completion of the project, an Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) was established in the University of Dhaka as a permanent body in 2018 as recommended by the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh.

The paper focused on the SWOT analysis from the findings of the self-assessment process and review of the assessment report by the external peer reviewers team with suggestions to improve in the teaching-learning method; research and extension; and governance at the University of Dhaka. Finally, Post Self-Assessment Improvement Plans (PSAIP) was prepared by the entities which were submitted through the university authority, IQAC-DU to the UGC and MoE to get financial support for improvement of the existing quality of education and research in the University of Dhaka.

METHODOLOGY

The self-assessment process followed the qualitative and quantitative methods. A survey was carried out by the trained Self-Assessment Committee (SAC) of each department/Institutions (called entity) using a questionnaire on nine criteria: i. Governance, ii. Curriculum content design and review, iii. Student admission, progress and achievements, iv. Physical facilities v. Teaching-learning.
and assessment, vi. Student support services, vii. Staff and facilities, viii. Research and extension and ix. Process management and continuous improvement. There were five groups of respondents that included faculty members, non-academic staffs, students, alumni and employers. Three members Apex body with staffs managed the self-assessment process of seventy-three entities (departments and institutions) in three phases from 2015-2018. Each entity formed a self-assessment committee. The IQAC organized a series of training programs for the SAC on different issues related to survey, reporting and future improvement planning. The SAC customized the questionnaire with the nine criteria following fifty-three standards according to their academic pursuance for survey on the five stakeholders. Both reports of seventy-three Departments/Institutes were used to prepare the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the University of Dhaka. At the time of reviewing the report, the reviewers’ team cross-checked the survey date and submitted a review report mentioning lapses and gaps and suggestions for improvement. On the basis of stakeholders’ response, the SAC prepared a data-based report for further evaluation by the external peer reviewers’ team composed of three members (one national and another foreign quality experts and one subject expert). The reviewers’ evaluated the report and gave their opinion with suggestions for further improvement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The SWOT analysis seemed to be the most crucial to determine the assessment status to fill up the existing gaps and further development of teaching-learning and strategies. On the basis of the reviewers’ report the SAC analysed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of the relevant entity. The overall analysis were as follows:

Strengths

As the premier and oldest university the Dhaka University has good reputation at home and abroad. It is well-organized by structure and facilities and also with national responsibilities [4]. The university is run by its academic calendar with well-structured control mechanism of academic and administrative activities that include largest academic echelon with diverse disciplines in Science, Arts, Law, Social Sciences, Business, Biological Sciences; Earth and Environmental Sciences, Pharmacy, Fine Arts, Engineering and Research Institutions divided into departments and institutions. All the faculties have their peer reviewed research journals; strong faculty profile and very qualified teaching staffs. They have continuous support from the government and the university. The directors and additional directors of IQAC-DU have local and overseas
training on QA. Good positive relationship exists between IQAC and SA Entities resulting in systematic and organized office activity; skilled and qualified support staffs and developed assessment culture. The largest service holders of public and private sectors are the graduates of this university who also go abroad for higher education under different scholarships.

Weaknesses

No mission and vision of the university and entities have been specifically set. There is no central policy and mechanism for QA in the University of Dhaka. There are inadequate number of officers and staffs to deal with such a big number of departments and institutions. The deans as the leaders of the faculties had not been involved throughout the project, thus there was a lack of knowledge in quality assessment procedure among the stakeholders. The governance is not transparent. Research funds are inadequate. Academic prospectus and syllabus are not given to the students duly. Teaching is basically job oriented instead of knowledge creation and students are very much involved with socio-political and economic activities than academia. There are no teachers evaluation mechanism and no option for peer review of teaching for development. In addition, there is inadequate training for teachers and office staffs, inadequate computer lab and less use of IT in teaching-learning and failure to follow the academic calendar. The number of classrooms are inadequate and there are no common rooms for students. There is a lack of QA practice among all stakeholders. None of the entities have curriculum other than syllabus. The website of the entities as well as the university are not up-to-date and functional The publications are not uploaded in the websites. Students’ facilities are inadequate and very limited accommodation in the dormitories and inadequate transportation for the students [5].

Opportunities

Formation of alumni associations and building relation between academia and industry will increase opportunities for the students within and outside of the university. Increase library facilities with updated references, books and journals; exchange programs for teachers and students should be introduced. Patenting and commercial use of research findings should be implemented. Infrastructure must be developed and rationally used. Enhance the use of IT in teaching and learning method and uploading the academic and research information in the website will increase reputation in the global academia and ensure better position the global ranking. Training for the academic and non-academic staff will ensure quality teaching and learning with introduction of teachers evaluation form. There should be a review the university admission policy and increase budgetary allocation according to the need of the entity [6]. Students sanitation and
dormitory and extra academic activities have to be increased. Reasonably good interest has been shown by the Self-Assessment Committees and other stakeholders; thus the development of awareness about quality assurance among stakeholders and establishment of IQAC office with policy and power under the university administration are to be enhanced. Continuation of quality assessment through the year and make report to the IQAC-DU; support from the UGC and the MoE can ensure quality and control in the academia [7]. Other than foreign governments offered scholarships, there are huge grants for post graduate higher studies for the Dhaka University teachers abroad [8].

**Threats**

Inadequate accommodation for classes and dormitories for the students are obstacles. Absence of professional and career counselling are highlighted. Extension of academia without proper planning and budget allocation are practiced. There are insufficient allocation for academic activities and research purpose. Less interaction between teachers and students beyond classrooms and less extra curriculum activities exist. Increasing trend of dropout, moral and ethical guidance are not addressed. The teaching-learning is not evaluated and no control over responsibilities. The university has complete dependency for financial support of the government. There are no collaboration between industries and university. The students and teachers have involvement with politics [9].

**CONCLUSIONS**

As the largest and oldest Academic Echelon, the University has been known as having huge human resources in teaching and administration. Thus, it always gets the best meritorious students at its entry levels and the students and parents always give preference to Dhaka University. In record, Dhaka University has about hundred years of experience in teaching and research. Some great world renowned scholars like Professor S. N Bose, Professor J. C. Dev, Dr. Shaidullah, A. Rashid, Ataul Karim, Jahid Hassan, Kazi Motahar Hossain etc. were the graduates and teachers of this university. It was unparalleled in this subcontinent till mid of the last century. However, today in the era of globalization it needs remodelling with its academic and research programmes. The SWOT analysis reveals the current status of the University. To address employability and entrepreneurship, pursuit of knowledge to meet the local and global needs, there is a need to focus through setting up the mission and vision by all the entities and the university as a whole. Without control over the responsibilities of the teachers and administration, no development can be ensured. Without introducing evaluation mechanism of the teachers and administrators, the objective of higher
education will be frustrated. Standard practice of teaching-learning must be introduced. Student’s guidance is an urgent prerequisite to build an ethical and knowledge-based society. Allocation for academic and research must be adequately increased. Student’s facilities and extra-curricular activities should be increased for better citizenry. The university has to be financially solvent and independent. Government has to allocate adequate amount of money to run the university properly. Students and teachers politics should be controlled/restricted. Only then the University of Dhaka will be able to meet the acceptation of the nation and serve mankind.

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