

## A SCENARIO OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY: BANGLADESH CONTEXT

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### ABSTRACT

*Higher education is considered key for the development of any country. In Bangladesh the modern concept of higher education was introduced in 1857 and after establishment of Dhaka University in 1921, Bangladeshi students got an opportunity to pursue higher education at tertiary level. Gradually the number of universities both public and private is increasing. It is said education without application is valueless but the lack of practical work in higher education is alarming. A good portion of the graduates remain unemployed after getting a degree from different applied subjects, leading to frustration and demotivation. This paper aims to identify the current scenario of graduates and their employability in Bangladesh. The main objective of this study is to look for the cause of unemployment, dissatisfaction in job and frustration. This study is an analytical study. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire where graduates from private and public universities (N=120) participated. Our findings will reflect the experiences of employed and unemployed graduates and the measures that need to be taken to ensure better employability. In preliminary findings we founds majority of the respondents identified lack of confidence, memorizing, lecture sheet method teaching-learning and lack of soft skills are the major cause for not getting expected job and lack of confidence even after getting job.*

**Field of Research:** Bangladesh, Employment, University Education, Unemployment, Dissatisfaction

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### 1. Introduction:

To pursue higher education in Bangladesh there are two categories of tertiary level institutions *e.g.*, degree awarding universities and colleges affiliated to the National University (NU) who also award degrees. There were only 4 universities in the country at the time of Bangladesh's independence back in 1971, which were publicly financed autonomous entities. According to the report of UGC (University Grant Commission, Bangladesh), at present, there are 41 such universities. Private universities are a relatively new phenomenon in this country. Back in 1990s, private sector came forward to establish universities in this country. Since then country experienced a spectacular growth in private universities—Mostly in and around Dhaka and couple of other large cities. At present, the country is equipped with more than 115 Private Universities, of which 97 are approved. Number of colleges offering tertiary level education is around 1,400. Most of them provide BA (pass) education of three years' duration and only one-third of them offer B.A. (Honors) courses. All of these colleges are affiliated to the NU, meaning, NU awards the degrees. Moreover, access to tertiary level education in Bangladesh is still very limited. According to UNESCO Institute of Statistics, gross enrolment ratio in tertiary level education in Bangladesh is about 17.33% as of 2016. More than 80 percent of these students are in the NU affiliated colleges. Others are in the public and private universities. Though the number of private

universities increased in recent decade, the student population served by these private universities is growing rather slowly.

There are some alarming and confusing issues related to graduation rate and employment rate of Bangladesh. A British Council sponsored report on graduate unemployment in South Asia, published earlier this year and it has produced a media storm in Bangladesh. Prepared by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), the report ranks Bangladesh above India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal in terms of employability of local graduates. The overall reported unemployment rate in Bangladesh is lower (5%) than that for India and Pakistan (8.5% and 6%). Though the overall macroeconomic conditions and GDP growth rate in Bangladesh have been favourable relative to India and Pakistan in recent years (particularly 2012 onwards), the estimated graduate unemployment rate appears questionable. Compared to a decade ago, the labour market and overall economic conditions of Bangladesh have been relatively more favourable to job seeking graduates. This again makes it hard to conceive that every 1 out of every 2 Bangladeshi graduates remains unemployed.

However, Bangladeshis are right to worry about the poor state of the country's education sector. After all, none of Bangladesh's newly set up public universities and private universities appear in any of the existing global rankings of universities around the world. Instead, most of these universities are frequently in the news for various irregularities, acts of student violence and governance related problems. Therefore, we should critically assess employment prospect of students graduating from these universities and welcome comparative analysis on the actual performance of Bangladeshi universities. A case study on University of Newcastle and Northumbria covered some key skills, which can be used not only during the students' time at university, but also, more significantly, when they move on to the work place (Alison Holmes & Stuart Miller, 2000). Another study reported that, a degree is no longer enough to guarantee employment. Employers are now looking for additional ingredients, which demonstrate that the graduate has not only acquired academic capabilities, but also developed the key skills that will enable a successful and expeditious transition from education into employment (Purcell *et. al* 1999).

Scientist suggested two concepts of employability, e.g., "narrow concept" and "broad concept" and they added that, the employability skills and attributes that an employer may demand depend upon the changing environment in which they operate, such as changing customer preferences, the actions of competitors and the state of the labour market. The 'narrow' view focusing on an individual's skills and attributes identifies important aspects of the employability equation, but omits other important aspects (Ronald W. McQuaid and Colin Lindsay, 2005). While defining employability, L. Harvey (2001) stated that, an "employability performance indicator" "of an institution and it is intended to be an indicator of the effectiveness of the institution in developing employable graduates. According to them, the choice between different measurements of employability is not merely academic. At the very least it is likely to have an impact on funding of institutions. Differences in thinking about what employability is and how to measure it will have effects on learning and teaching and the provision of support services.

It can be argued that peer assessment contributes positively towards the development of employability skills and should therefore be a routinely implemented educational practice in higher education (Simon Cassidy, 2006). There is a need for support and reassurance from tutors, providing clear guidance and meaningful and structured framework to enable students develop the necessary evaluative skills to perform peer assessment and to help them accept the responsibility of an assessor. A significant reciprocal association between consistent extracurricular activity participation and the development of interpersonal competence is found in another study. Participation in extracurricular activities may afford opportunities to build interpersonal skills and construct positive plans for the future. These skills are, in turn, associated with high educational status at young adulthood (Joseph L. Mahoney, *et. al.* 2003). It was observed that CGPA, an indication of the engineering knowledge of the individual, is insignificant

in predicting the employability of engineering students in campus recruitment drives. It is generally the analytical and problem-solving skills coupled with the 'right' attitude that an information technology company is seeking when selecting engineering graduates. These observations suggest that what mattered for an engineering undergraduate's success during the campus recruitment drives is a well-developed, effective education. However, studies conducted among engineering graduates have revealed that academic achievements cannot be considered as a predictor for job performance (V. K. Gokuladas, 2010). There must be Coordination among the efforts of academia, industry and the government and also encouraging the traits which are expected by the prospective employers (Lee, D. M. S. 1986). It can be said that, employers, even in highly technical scientific jobs, generally value certain generic skills and traits above specialist occupational skills and knowledge (Sarang, 2012). This is not to ignore the importance of subject knowledge, but to emphasise the added value of effective personal qualities and core skills. Moreover, it should be recognised, particularly with changing economic conditions and the global challenges currently employers facing that other skills, such as entrepreneurial response and an ability for multi-cultural working, are likely to emerge as important attributes for new graduate recruits (Paliwal, 2009).

Finally, it is not difficult to argue that, the unemployment of graduates in Bangladesh can be explained by the simultaneous operation of forces acting from both the demand and supply sides of the labour market for graduates. Employability does appear to be an important factor affecting the demand for graduates, but it is not true that graduates are in general unemployable. Graduates with some specializations are clearly more employable than others, and the rate of unemployment is distinctly lower for them. Thus, a kind of structural imbalance does seem to exist in the labour market for graduates. The education system is simply producing some types of graduates who are not needed by the labour market (Archer, W. and Davison, J., 2008)

The present study covers all these aspects into consideration to conduct a survey in the context of Bangladesh to have a clear picture of the scenario of higher education and employability in the country.

## **2. Objectives of the Study:**

The objective of this study will be to investigate the current scenario of employability among fresh graduates and employees who just entered into job. The objective of the current research is to find out the answers to the following questions:

- a. What do our graduates really think about employability?
- b. Why graduates are not getting expected job despite vacancies being available?
- c. Reasons for dissatisfaction in the job place.
- d. What steps should be taken to improve employability from university and students?
- e. What should be teaching and learning strategies to prepare students for the job market?

## **3. Research Design and Methodology:**

A primary study was conducted before the actual data collection for testing the validity of the questionnaire as well as to get valuable feedbacks and suggestions from the respondents.

### **3.1 Respondents of this Research**

The study focuses on graduates and master's students from different departments from two private universities and two public universities of Bangladesh especially those who are in jobs and searching for a new job. There were a total of 100 respondents involved in this study. The private universities are Daffodil International University, North South University, the public universities are University of Dhaka and Jagannath University. The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents in order to collect data for analysis.

### **3.2 Research Instrument**

For the purpose of the study a structured questionnaire was used as the instrument. The contents of the questionnaire are essential for the present research because they have direct relations to the research questions and objectives. The analysis of the data was based on the students' responses to seventeen (17) questions including both open ended and closed type.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

The questionnaire was distributed to respondents at University. After completing all the copies were collected back from them for data analysis.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

We used Microsoft Office 13 version for the analysis of the close ended question. The findings of the present study are shown in the tables, and then narrative description is presented in the text in a quantitative manner. Finally, the data is interpreted in the contextual and the descriptive methods.

## **4. Findings and discussion:**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Respondents (%)</b>	<b>Male (%)</b>	<b>Female (%)</b>
Public University	47(39.16)	28 (59.57)	19 (40.42)
Private University	73(60.83)	49(67.12)	24 (32.87)
Total	120	77 (64.1)	33 (27.5)

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents according to institution (private and public)

Among 120 respondents a major portion were from private universities and 47 respondents were from public universities. 64.1% of the total respondents were male and 27.5% were female. Number of private universities are more than public universities. Parents are sending their children in urban areas for pursuing higher education in private universities even though they have to consider a large amount of finance.



Figure 1: Respondent’s perception about employability

Students were asked to write the meaning of employability what he/she understood. Employability is the qualities of an individual which are required to fulfil the need and demand of employers as well as these qualities will help the graduates to be successful in career. From the above figure we can see the perception of graduates about employability. Majority of the respondents defined employability as required skills which are helping to get job. Some respondents urged that employability is the capacity to achieve meaningful employment. According to Cambridge dictionary employability ‘the skills and abilities that allow you to be employed’. So it is clear that almost all the respondents accurately identified the meaning of employability.

Discipline	Number of Respondents (%)	Employed (%)	Unemployed (%)
Medical Science	28 (23.33)	16 ( 57.14)	12 (42.85)
Commerce	15 (12.5)	14 (93.33)	1(6.66)
Social Science	10 (8.33)	6 (60)	4 (40)
Engineering	23 (19.16)	18 (78.26)	5 (21.73)
Arts	17 (14.16)	12 (70.58)	6 (35.29)
Management	8 (6.66)	6 (75)	2 (25)
Law	7 (5.83)	5 (71.42)	2 (28.57)
Food Science	12 (10)	10 (83.33)	2 (16.66)
Total ( N=120)		87 (72.5)	33 (27.5)

Table 2: Distribution of the employed and unemployed respondents by specialization

Table 2 is showing the number of employed and unemployed graduates among different groups of graduate. Among all the respondent maximum were from medical science discipline (Pharmacist, doctors, Biotechnologist) and from engineering (computer science, architecture, software, civil) background (23 respondents). Our findings indicating 72.5% respondents were employed and 27.5% respondents were unemployed. Those who are employed majority of them got job after 5-7 months of their graduation and those who are unemployed still they are searching for job or doing masters though they have completed their graduation almost 1-1.5 years before. Some graduates are doing part-time job and claiming that still they are searching for a satisfactory job.

Discipline	Satisfied (%)	Dissatisfied (%)	Unknown (%)
Medical Science (28)	22 (78.5)	4 (14)	-
Commerce (15)	11 (73.3)	3 (20)	1 (6.6)
Social Science (10)	7 (70)	1 (10)	2 (20)
Engineering (23)	18 (78.26)	5 (21.73)	-
Arts (17)	14 (82.35)	2 (11.76)	1 (5.88)
Management( 8)	8 (100)	-	-
Law (7)	6 (85.71)	-	1 (14.28)
Food Science (12)	10 (83.33)	1 (8.33)	1 (8.33)

Table 3: Distribution of employed graduate opinion about their job satisfaction

Graduates sometimes have unrealistic expectations about career and job. It is because lack of information about the labour market for the educated and the non-availability of career guidance for students which leading them frustration. We can assume that there may have the following cause of dissatisfaction of graduates. First, inadequate skills and subjective knowledge. Seconds, wrong expectation from the organizations. From table 3 it is identified that majority of the respondents are satisfied about their job. A notable portion of the respondents are not satisfied as they expect better job than current one.

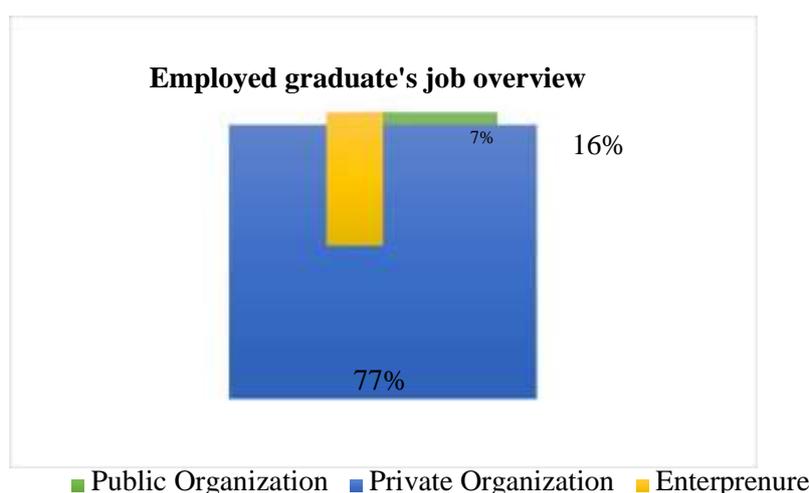
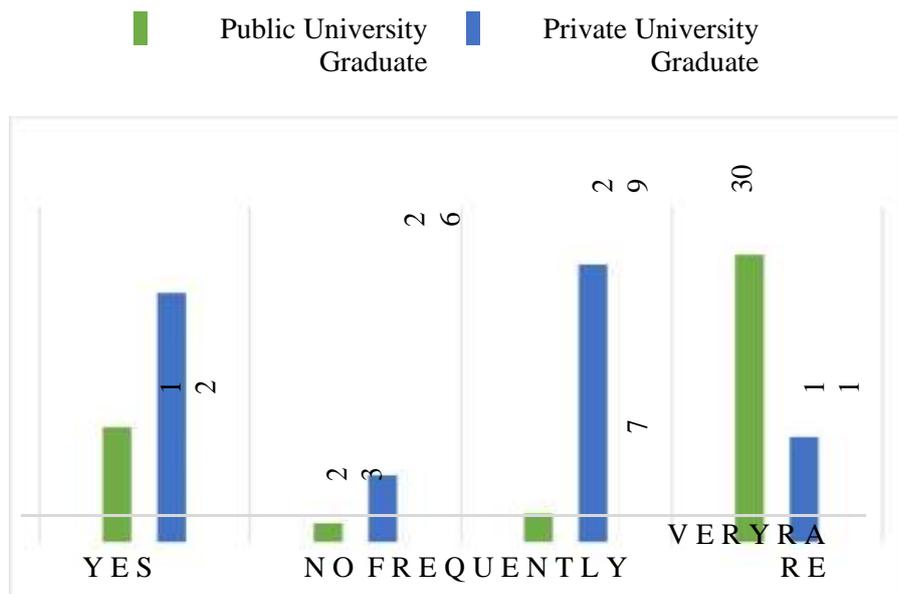


Chart 1: Distribution of respondents who are working in private and public sectors

Private sector is playing an important role in economic development of Bangladesh through the direct contribution of production, investment and export. As the number of industries are increasing opportunities are creating for the graduates. More over people believe doing job in public organization is more secure. In recent years it has been observed that graduates are more eager to do job in public sectors. This study revealed that 77% of the total employed respondents are working in private organizations and 16% are working in public organizations. Now a days the term **entrepreneur** is getting more popular were graduates are motivated to do business. The young graduates are playing role in social, technological, demographic, cultural and economic forces from which they may get a significant benefits as well as they will be able to contribute for the country's economy directly. Our findings shows that 7% of the total graduate employed are entrepreneur



Graph 1: Does your institution cooperate for enhancing graduate employability?

Graduates were asked the question that are they getting any cooperation which is helping them for getting job. Surprisingly we have seen majority of private university students said they are getting support from the university but public university students said it is not happening always.

Cause	Responses (%)
Lack of subjective and practical knowledge	38 (77)
Memorizing without understanding lecture	40 (83.67)
Inadequate skills and competency	33 (67)
Too much competitive job market	16 (32)
Public Private discrimination	7 (14)
Poor salary verses high expectations	11 (22)
Lack of guidance and lobbying	17 (34)

Table 4: Responses of the unemployed and dissatisfied graduates about the possible facts to be unemployed and dissatisfaction.

There are a number of specific causes for job dissatisfaction which has been identified by the graduates. The finding of the table 4 showing some reasons where students identified their educational incompetency and lack of skills as prime cause.

<b>Priority</b>	<b>Skills</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Skills</b>
1	Intelligence	9	Communication Skill
2	Problem solving	10	Quick learner
3	Confidence	11	Creative
4	Self-motivated	12	Flexible
5	English Fluency	13	Enthusiasm
6	Professional	14	Team work
7	Leadership	15	Organised
8	Computer skills	16	Dependable

Table 5: Prioritising skills: Graduates view to be employable

Here in table 5 some skills are identified by the respondents which are required to achieve success. Employability skills are usually known as foundational skills or job skills. These are soft skills that allow a person to work well with others, apply knowledge to solve problems and fit into any work environment. The skills are organized in the table as maximum respondents identified these skills as requirements for their job. From a survey report of University of Kent it has been identified that top ten employability skills are Communication Skills, Teamwork, Awareness, Analysing & Investigating, Initiative/Self-Motivation, Drive, Written Communication, Planning and Flexibility. We can say respondents successfully identified the skills which are really required to be employable.

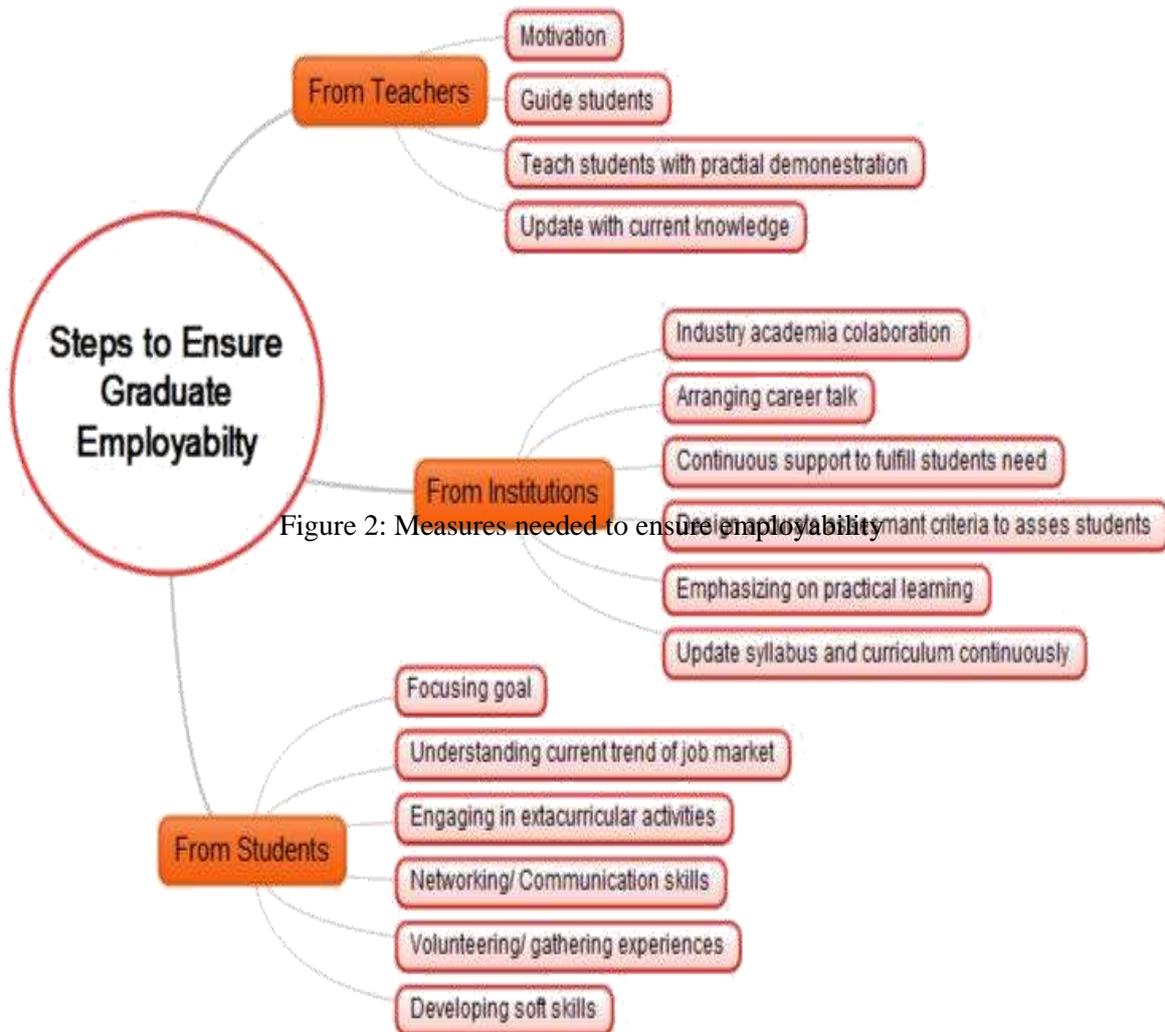


Figure 2: Measures needed to ensure employability

Here students identified some measures which should have to ensure from three different ends (students, teachers, and institutions). Both compatible policy and teaching methods can help students to be employable. An institution should ensure practical learning and industry academia collaboration where teacher will motivate students to participate.

### 5. Conclusion:

There is no alternative for development without education. Universities providing education and every year more than one million graduates are coming in the job market for searching job but the reality is very few are capable of grabbing the dream job. The current study revealed so many findings about this issue. It is clear that the collaboration or the partnership between educational institutions and workplaces, proper grooming can be a practical way to increase skills desired by contemporary employers and thus, to enhance employability for graduates.

Our findings indicating that all the graduates can understand that they need skills to ensure their employability but unfortunately they can't achieve in properly during their student life. If we can come out from traditional thinking and can concentrated only in skilled based education unemployed problem will be reduced because knowledge without skill is just entertainment.

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